

# WHY DUBCEK FELL



**Pavel Tigrid**

On a sleepy summer night in August 1968, the citizens of Czechoslovakia awakened in their thousands to the steady noise of planes flying at low altitudes. A tank column of the Red Army wound its way through the streets of Prague and in the regions bordering East Germany, tanks, armoured cars and soldier-loaded trucks poured across the border. Thus was Czechoslovakia invaded by the forces of its five Warsaw-Pact Allies.

**WHY DUBCEK FELL** sets out to answer the questions arising from that fateful night and the events which followed it: why was a country, actively led by a communist party still faithful to its alliances and ideology, the object of aggression by the Soviet Union? Why was the 'Prague Spring' once ignored by the Soviet leaders, subsequently feared, condemned and halted? By what pressures and by what means did the Soviet Union remove the Czech leadership? Has the end of the Dubcek era coincided with a rebirth of Stalinisation in their country?

With the help of Czechoslovak documents—many of them original and hitherto confidential both inside and outside that country—Pavel Tigrid demonstrates that Dubcek's "socialism with a human face" was doomed from the outset.

In his view, and his opinion is borne out by minutes made available to him by Czech party members of the meetings of the Czechoslovak Central Committee, and of the confrontations between the Czechoslovak and Soviet leaders at Cierna, Bratislava and Moscow, the Soviet leaders feared for the dominant position of their country within the Soviet block and for their power within their own borders.

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In 1969, *Rude pravo* declared that Tigríd has been "informed minutely and quickly of almost everything that has been said of importance, in secret at the highest levels of the party and the state". In **WHY DUBCEK FELL** he examines the rise and fall of Alexander Dubcek and what he stood for with insight and skill, and sources which are all too often denied to contemporary history.

Pavel Tigríd is a distinguished and experienced journalist who has seen a good deal of life on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Born in 1917, he was educated at Charles University in Prague. He spent the war years working for the BBC in London, and in 1945 returned home, where he became editor of a national weekly. But in 1948, after the Communist take-over, he moved to the West again, first to West Germany and then to the United States. He now lives in France, where he edits the Czech-language quarterly *Svedectvi*, and where his first book on the Prague Spring (*Printemps de Prague*) was a runaway success.

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by the same author

*Le Printemps de Prague*

Pavel Tigrid

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FELL

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## CONTENTS

### *Author's Note*

#### I A HERESY IS BORN

1. Alexander Dubcek – a hero against his will 9
2. 'Be with us' – but how? 41
3. Soviet nerves and Soviet tanks 53
4. Socialism with a human face? 66
5. At Cierna and Bratislava 82

#### II BETWEEN PRAGUE AND MOSCOW

1. 21 August 1968 : the political failure of a successful invasion 99
2. In the Kremlin 112
3. Legalized aggression 124

#### III THE LAST BATTLE OF ALEXANDER DUBCEK

1. Introducing order into chaos 137
2. Finale : the 'ice-hockey' crisis 155

#### IV WINTER IN PRAGUE

1. Intrigues and revenge 168
2. The Dubcek experiment : a post-mortem 194

#### APPENDICES

- A. The Moscow Protocol (full text) 210
- B. Minutes of negotiations between Vasil V. Kuznetsov and the President of the Czechoslovak National Assembly, Josef Smrkovsky, 11 September 1968 215

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS book could not have been written had it not been for the Czech and Slovak Communists, among them officials of the Party, who provided me with vital information and the confidential documents on which this volume is based. It may seem strange that long-time and devoted comrades were willing to cooperate (and take no small personal risks) with a 'bourgeois journalist' considered by the Stalinists of their own Party to be a traitor and tool in the hands of all kinds of western devils. But this paradox, at a closer look, has a certain logic. As a matter of fact it fits into the pattern of the many other similar apparent paradoxes which marked the eighteen months of what can be called the era of Alexander Dubcek.

After all, did not Czechoslovak *communists* decide to criticize, with enthusiasm, their own creation, i.e. the twenty years' rule of communism in Czechoslovakia? Did they not criticize it in lucid, pitiless and scorching terms, which even their violent western opponents would hesitate to employ? Did they not, Marxist revolutionaries though they were, launch an attempt to liberalize a system which they themselves once proclaimed an example of antiliberalism for all the world to see? Did they not breathe new life into and norms they once spoke of as 'bourgeois relics' (which are, indeed, only too often sadly devalued in the 'free world'), such as freedom, justice and human dignity? And after all, did not five communist countries using twenty-nine divisions, 7,500 tanks and 1,000 planes invade a sixth communist country in order to promote 'international proletarian solidarity'? One could continue along these lines but let us rather thank these courageous people living in Prague and in Bratislava, whose names obviously cannot be divulged, for enabling me to attempt what I propose to do in this book.

First, to sketch what Alexander Dubcek and his friends wanted to achieve (and what kind of a man Dubcek was): what their original intentions were, how far, and why, they were carried away by inexorable forces which they themselves had unleashed. In short, to evaluate the Dubcek experiment.



Second, to attempt to answer (with the help of the documents mentioned above) the question why the second strongest power in the world decided to invade a small country in the heart of Europe, one moreover directed by a Communist Party – a country wanting to remain faithful to the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact and to the communist cause in general. We shall try to discern in the Soviet moves during and after the invasion the main forces which were at work here, and thus to determine Moscow's military, ideological, diplomatic and power priorities.

Third, we shall follow the developments of the last months of the Dubcek era up to the elimination of the former First Secretary from public life in September 1969 and his final disgrace in June 1970.

Finally, and on a more speculative note, an attempt will be made to evaluate the Dubcek experiment in terms of its likely historical impact.

I would like to thank Jean Bloch-Michel for his invaluable help and the newspaper *Le Monde*, for their permission to use in this book the articles I had written for its Czechoslovak columns. Finally, I must thank my wife since without her encouragement this project would probably not have been brought to a successful conclusion.

# I A Heresy is Born

## CHAPTER ONE

### ALEXANDER DUBCEK - A HERO AGAINST HIS WILL

Carnations, roses, tulips,  
sweet-smelling sprigs of  
lilac and lily of the valley  
are thrown at the rostrum. . .  
this is the spring of our  
new existence. . .

*Rude pravo*, 2 May 1968.

It is not possible to  
preach socialism by dressing  
it up in different poetic  
epithets. . .

*Rude pravo*, 7 June 1969.

How beautiful it all was. Contemporary descriptions of that day make it sound like a spectacular masque put on in some exotic country, and even the most hardened reader feels tears welling in his eyes. The day: 1 May 1968. The place: Wenceslas Square, Prague's historic avenue. A never-ending procession, flags, gay shouts of enthusiasm. 'This year nothing will be the same as before,' said the Czechoslovak Communist Party's main paper. 'I have never seen a First of May like this,' a metal worker from the C.K.D. Sokolovo factory confessed to journalists. He spoke as one who since 1945 had never once been missing from the ranks of the Communist Party's May Day procession. 'Before, we all used to arrive at a run and take up the places allotted to us. Then it was an obligatory, official parade, prepared long in advance.' A change indeed!

'Of our own free will, for the first time,' said a calico banner. And among all these voluntary marchers there were even people representing organizations which had been silenced for twenty years: veterans of the 'bourgeois legions' from the First World War and of the International Brigades from the Spanish Civil War, ex-servicemen from the Western fronts of the Second World War, and even former political prisoners. Alongside these uniforms, out of their moth-balls for the first time in years, marched the representatives of the younger generation: Boy Scouts and also members of the 'Club for committed non-party

people' which had just been founded; there was even a group of small landowners and artisans, wearing the characteristic costumes of their former guilds. The weather was quite good, but as the Czechoslovak Communist Party paper emphasized, 'the most important thing about that day was the fine political climate, the springlike blossoming of our new public life, the breath of fresh air brought by democratic freedoms.'<sup>\*</sup>

In the middle of the official rostrum stood the hero of the day, the conqueror of Novotny and the forces of the past, the man who wanted to give socialism a human face – watching this glorious procession with a jovial smile which changed occasionally to an expression of childlike wonder: Alexander Dubcek, Sacha, our Dubcek, whom the young hailed enthusiastically: 'The heart of our republic beats for your policy.' And Sacha, improvising a loudhailer with his hands, answered: 'Long live youth.' Then he presented President Svoboda, whose name means 'liberty' in Czech, for the crowds to cheer, assuring them that his zeal would prevent the spring from freezing. On the rostrum he was surrounded by his faithful companions: Kriegel, Smrkovsky, Professor Sik, Colonel Zatopek, and others who clapped as the banners passed by, proclaiming 'No more repression for the opposition' or 'Our Party draws its strength not from its power but the truth.'

Scarcely a year later Comrade Husak was to describe all this as only he knows how: 'Naïveté and political romanticism prevailed in the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party after January 1968. . .'<sup>†</sup>

Was Alexander Dubcek the inspirer of this romantic ideology, or was he merely its representative, or symbol? How much did he himself influence his period, lasting as it did for about 200 days? Or was he, on the contrary, formed and determined by it? Circumstances seem to have conspired to make Alexander Dubcek the embodiment of the new Czechoslovakia and the leading hero of the Czechoslovak dream, as John F. Kennedy had been of the new America and the American dream. These two protagonists, widely different as they are, both personified in their own way the desires and hopes of the great majority of

<sup>\*</sup>*Rude pravo*, 2 May 1968.

<sup>†</sup>At the International Conference of communist parties in Moscow, 11 June 1969.

their people. Both promised to rid the political system they had been chosen to head of its most shocking and cruel extremes – of its most discriminatory and least democratic practices. Both were young and of agreeable appearance; both gave to their political tasks a new, more supple style, arousing enthusiasm in the young and making certain fossilized members of the bureaucracy quite sick at heart. Their dreams came to similar ends: those of Kennedy and his brother vanished in the smoke of gunshots fired by two distraught fanatics; Dubcek's was brutally ended by fanatics of a reactionary power which had to destroy the dream once there was a chance it would be realized.

Here the similarity ends. Alexander Dubcek was first and foremost a product of the Party apparatus. He was born on 27 November 1921 at Uhrovec, a little village in western Slovakia. His father, a joiner, went to seek his fortune in the United States before the First World War, but returned home when the war ended. He became one of the first members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and in 1925, after the death of Lenin, he emigrated to the U.S.S.R., taking with him his two sons, Alexander and Julius, aged four and five respectively. The family settled in Kirghizia; the father worked for some years in a cooperative at Frounze before moving on to Gorki.

Alexander Dubcek continued his studies till he returned to Czechoslovakia in 1938. The family then settled in the town of Trencin. From the age of eighteen, Sacha was a member of the Slovak Communist Party, which was then illegal. In order to carry out his clandestine political activities he worked at the Skoda factory at Dulnice. When the Slovak Uprising broke out in August 1944, he took part in it with his brother Julius as members of a partisan brigade operating in western Slovakia. Julius was killed in a skirmish in January 1945 and Sacha was wounded twice.

After the liberation, he worked in the Party's regional organization at Trencin and lived as a manual labourer would. In 1949 he became a full-time Party official; to begin with he was responsible for organizational matters before becoming secretary of the Party district committee. From then on he made the Party his career and rose up the administrative ladder. In 1955 the Party sent him to the advanced Party school attached to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist

Party in Moscow, to perfect himself politically. He spent three years there and after his return home his promotion was rapid; in 1960 he was elected to the Secretariat of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, in 1962 to the Praesidium; in 1963 he succeeded the Stalinist, Karol Bacilek, as First Secretary of the Slovak Party. On 5 January 1968 he replaced Novotny as head of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.

The education he had received in the advanced Party school and his experience in the Party apparatus inculcated blind discipline, as well as limiting his horizons and defining his terms of reference. Yet he also kept something which distinguishes him from some of his companions, cynics, opportunists and tacticians of all kinds as they are: an unshakeable faith in communism, Alexander Dubcek is a believer who never lost his faith, not even on 21 August 1968 when he was abducted by force, denounced as a counter-revolutionary and his whole future put in the balance. He was greatly pained when taxed with something of which he was incapable: the betrayal of communism. To him Marxism-Leninism is a universal teaching, the most progressive science in the world, just as the communist regime is the most highly developed and just of all regimes. And if excesses, such as judicial murder and genocide, have been committed in the name of this teaching, in the name of communism, he always believed that it was precisely because communists were not following the red star, because they had strayed from the right path, betrayed their ideal, abandoned or distorted the principles governing the movement. This is what Alexander Dubcek had learned and this is what he believed. As far as he was concerned, if the magnificent engine of communism was not working properly, it could only mean – as a consequence and in the context of unfavourable circumstances – that it was not being handled as it should. Alexander Dubcek thus thought that to set it right one had only to do the necessary repairs – and he himself was ready to form part of just such a team of modern mechanics oriented towards the future.

This unshakeable faith was matched by an equal optimism which he had inherited from his father, a Slovak communist and idealist. One of his close associates testified to these qualities:

It was at the same time unbelievable and touching. There were

moments – in Moscow, Cierna and Prague – when our Soviet ‘friends’ humiliated Dubcek as a man, a communist and a Slovak, when they dragged him in the mud and stamped on him. It made us sick at heart: this is the end, we said to ourselves, let’s forget it. The first shock over, Dubcek would quickly pull himself together and weigh up all that had been said, overlooking the abuse, and decide what was important and what only threats. He would examine all the points agreed on and announce that despite everything there was still ‘a certain margin of action’ for further negotiations and manoeuvres. Then he would work out how to broaden this margin and set to work again. He was capable of standing up to the Soviet Ambassador in Prague for hours on end, even though he would collapse afterwards, exhausted, and give way to despair. But never for long.

Dubcek’s benevolence, which sometimes bordered on artlessness, is well known. His trustfulness was so sincere that it plunged his most set opponents into confusion. Before January 1968, Dubcek, who is every inch a Slovak, had only been able to familiarize himself with Slovak problems; he loved people, he loved his friends and he led a quiet family life, proud of his three sons. Sometimes he used to go in for various sports; the privileges of the ‘new class’ did not tempt him, he himself felt no need for them.

Faithful to his ideas, naïve, candid, straightforward, optimistic, modest – all these qualities singly or together were not bound to endanger Dubcek’s irresistible rise to power. The danger however was latent in his tendency to indecision, a characteristic quickly branded as weakness in politics. It was in fact a serious failing, especially in the circumstances attending Dubcek’s rise to power and in the events which followed at home in the country and in its relations with Moscow. Right from the start, it was an open secret in the Praesidium of the Party, in the Secretariat and the Central Committee, that Dubcek was a ‘hesitater’, an ‘innocent’, a ‘decent fellow who does not like drastic measures’. . . In fact, in January 1968 Jiri Hendrych, Novotny’s right-hand man, said ‘Dubcek is an honest man but he is indecisive.’

Before 1967, hardly anyone had heard of him, especially on the international scene. His activities were centred in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. All documents relating to Dubcek

confirm that he was an obedient official for many years and that it was not till well on in his career that he began to perceive the authoritative nature of the power wielded from Prague by Antonin Novotny. Even then his criticisms only took the form of disagreement – shared by several of his Slovak comrades – with Novotny's centralist policy, which allowed Slovak communists very little influence – and finally none whatsoever – in Party and State affairs.

In the early fifties, Dubcek rose in the Slovak Party apparatus – at a time when the 'bourgeois nationalists' were being purged or imprisoned, including people like Gustav Husak, a first-class politician, and the poet Ladislav Novomesky. In 1952 even Vladimir Clementis, the former Foreign Minister, was executed. In June 1963 Dubcek was still an open supporter of Prague's official line of hostility to the Slovak 'bourgeois nationalists' – though now they were no longer traitors but simply 'deviationists'. At that time he said in a speech at a meeting of the regional Party officials at Bratislava :

We find ourselves up against false and harmful ideas that would have us believe that bourgeois nationalism is merely an imaginary aspect of the personality cult, something unreal. . . . Bourgeois nationalism was quite justly denounced at the 14th Congress of the Slovak Communist Party as 'an ideology which is fundamentally alien to Marxism-Leninism.

Although he was aware that this resolution was distorted by the period of the personality cult, voted in as it was by the 1950 Congress which was held in true Stalinist spirit, ten years later he nonetheless criticized all those Slovaks who tried to right these mistakes. Dubcek was on Novotny's side in this matter. Yet there was no persecution of the Slovak journalists and communist writers who were not prepared to toe the line and who were in fact the forerunners of the Czechoslovak spring before it blossomed out in Prague. They were left in peace to express their ideas and publish their writings (with occasional difficulties), whilst the former 'bourgeois nationalists', including Husak, contented themselves with quietly acquiring various posts which were not of political importance. In retrospect, one might say quite truly that Dubcek was a Janus Bifrons, conforming to Novotny's views on the one hand, and on the other giving his

comrades in Bratislava a helping hand, showing indulgence towards their errors.

With time Alexander Dubcek gained confidence in himself and found the courage to air his reformist views. His attitude to Novotny became increasingly critical and in 1967 he made himself heard at many Party proceedings in Prague. However, he confined himself almost exclusively to the Slovak problem. Being a loyal Slovak himself he was genuinely indignant at Novotny's arrogant and ignorant attitude to Slovakia.

He stressed that at the end of the Second World War the Slovaks had been the first to work for the restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic. In this oblique way he drew attention to the agreements signed at the cessation of hostilities; it must be remembered that between 1945 and the end of 1947, Slovakia was quasi-independent in the management of its own affairs. Dubcek referred to this in the last issue of *Pravda* (the Slovak Party daily) for 1967 :

We must refer again to the ideas and principles which inspired the progressive forces of our two nations when our common state was restored after the Munich tragedy and the war of 1939-45.

These were gentle suggestions, but explicit ones nevertheless. Shortly after, Dubcek and his friends realized clearly that a satisfactory solution to the Slovak problem (which meant giving the four million Slovaks the same privileges as those enjoyed by the ten million Czechs and Moravians) could not be found without totally reorganizing the centralized, bureaucratic structure of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, the only real power centre in the country. This was the background to the demands he formulated repeatedly in 1967. On 21 February 1967, he wrote in *Nova mysl*:

The Party's chief means of action is and must be persuasion . . . administrative measures are alien to the whole spirit of our Party. One cannot achieve unity of action . . . by pressures or by a general call to order, but only by seeking the best solution to each problem in a spirit of objectivity and then patiently trying to convince the people of its validity.

Dubcek stressed that 'nothing could stop the Party from criti-



cizing methods used in the past . . .', and he advocated what he called an 'attitude of constructive disagreement' in considering the way the Party functioned, stating firmly that its members 'could not be satisfied with the present state of affairs . . .'. Then he moved on to open denunciation of Novotny and his way of ruling the Party. He wrote in the same paper on 31 December 1967 :

The Party was created for the workers, it exists to serve the workers and it is the main political force of the workers. The Party does not have a life of its own, above or outside society – on the contrary it is an integral part of society. This must be the basic premise of all communist thought and it is inconceivable that the Party, which is the whole of society in effect, should not be willing to recognize this. We must oppose all manifestations of superiority, all subjectivism, and it is essential that we resist all attempts to impose the Party's influence on society by methods which society might consider authoritarian or coercive. . .

Dubcek took up a similar position on the Party's cultural policy. In a speech given in May 1967, he declared himself for an understanding and sensitive attitude 'even when considering ideas open to ambiguous interpretation'. He described the administrative regimentation of cultural activities as 'a deadly phenomenon which should be avoided at all costs'.

To understand fully the irresistible rise of our hero largely against his will, two circumstances should be stressed. First of all, Dubcek in January 1968 took over a Stalinist, bureaucratic regime already on the verge of bankruptcy and bursting at the seams. To avoid disintegration this system had to be reformed somehow. This task would fall to whoever became the successor of Antonin Novotny, an *apparatchik* of the dogmatic type who had presided over this bankrupt regime for fifteen years. Secondly, for twenty years it had been forbidden to analyse, evaluate and least of all criticize. Consequently, when Dubcek and his friends gave the 'green light' to criticism of the Novotny regime, when they liberalized and finally lifted the censorship, the pressure stifled for two decades burst forth with an explosion, taking the form of an unprecedented popular debate on the 'Czechoslovak road to socialism'. This brilliant and passionate discussion was in fact the backbone of the 'Prague Spring'. Dubcek was carried

away by this storm of public opinion and when the floodgates had been opened it was both useless and impossible to swim against the tide.

After fifteen years of Novotny's reign (and consequently that of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia which had come to power with so much pomp and so many promises in February 1948) the extent of this collapse was shattering. Indeed, it was **more extensive** than estimated by western specialists. Hardly any area of public life was immune from this failure. In 1967, the deepening crisis had showed itself mainly in four spheres: *Slovakia* (involving a national crisis), the *economy* (the Czechoslovak national economy was on the verge of catastrophe); the *legal system* (judicial crimes and violations of 'socialist legality' committed on direct Soviet and Party orders in the fifties and then the half-hearted rehabilitation of the victims of this arbitrary justice); *party and ideology* (the accumulation of power, the decline of the Party as an ideological and 'leading' force in the country).

A devastating, and in some ways unique, picture of this crisis was given by Czech and Slovak communists themselves at two plenary sessions of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Party in December 1967 and January 1968. The minutes of these confidential discussions – the last of which (5 January 1968) ended with the replacement of Novotny as First Secretary by Alexander Dubcek – exist but have never been published. They amount to over 1,500 typewritten pages; every copy was numbered and handed out to selected Party officials in Prague who had to sign for them. During the Prague Spring it was decided that these documents should be published; but finally the idea was dropped. Certain speeches were considered too compromising for the entire Party, and some of the comments made by lifelong communists presented too devastating a review of twenty years of communism in Czechoslovakia. In addition, this material – from which we quote some of the more interesting passages – provides a rather rare opportunity to peep into the kitchen of the supreme body of a Communist Party when the most complicated menu is just being prepared; namely a change in the hierarchy of a system which had always experienced difficulty in solving the problem of succession. Consequently, such changes were hardly ever possible without a web of

intrigues and power-struggles which often shattered the system's foundations.

Such was the situation this time too when the 'strongman' of the regime had to be eliminated. Antonin Novotny, besides holding the office of Party First Secretary, was also President of the Republic, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and Commander of the so-called People's Militia (armed units of the Party, known as the 'iron fist of the working class'). Furthermore, Novotny had the powerful Party apparatus fully in his grasp and, needless to add, the secret police. In the Party he was a man to be feared, able and willing to use both the carrot and the stick. He did not hesitate to push potential rivals into oblivion (for example, in 1962, he had ordered the trial and imprisonment of Rudolph Barak, a member of the Praesidium and the Minister of the Interior); or to rid himself unscrupulously of his most devoted comrades when they became political deadweights (for example, in 1964, he jettisoned Viliam Siroky, his Prime Minister and a member of the Praesidium).

Novotny was a vain man and he loved power. Consequently, he had not the least intention of resigning but fought for his position to the last. Even his opponents – who, moreover, were not properly organized and had joined hands against Novotny for different and sometimes opposing reasons – had no idea at the end of 1967 how near victory was. The minutes of the Central Committee meetings show clearly that chance, caprice, petty intrigues and bad tempers played an important role at the moment of crisis. Indeed, it was a combination of these marginal factors which contributed to the birth of the new hero – Alexander Dubcek – and what has since become known as the 'Prague Spring'.

In fact, the Czechoslovak crisis which was to have such far-reaching consequences started at a session of the Central Committee on 30–31 October 1967. Nothing indicated that this plenum would differ from the hundreds of previous ones; the procedure and routine were the same; 'theses' were presented on the 'Position and Role of the Party in the Present Stage of Development of our Socialist Society'. This dogmatic and long-winded twenty-two-page document stated among other things that 'it is indispensable for the state to exercise a repressive function towards all internal and external anti-Socialist forces and

negative manifestations in society.' The leading ideologist, Jiri Hendrych, delivered the opening speech, members pulled ready-made 'contributions to the discussion' out of their pockets and the Praesidium and Secretariat expected that everything would be unanimously agreed upon in the usual way, including the drafts of the resolutions prepared beforehand.

It should be noted here that the Central Committee had been filled for years with Novotny's faithful supporters, mostly rather primitive and often plainly stupid *apparatchiks*. In this way, Novotny and his gang were always sure of a majority if not a unanimous vote in this body. In addition, voting was done by a show of hands. It would have taken an audacious, indeed reckless comrade to raise his hand in protest. Novotny was also a gifted tactician; whenever pressures were too great or problems too pressing, he was flexible enough to yield in time. Thus, on the economy, Novotny finally agreed that reforms were necessary and even accepted (on paper, of course) some of the basic theses of Ota Sik, later known as the 'father of the Czechoslovak economic reform'. In the last years of his reign he recognized the necessity of making good the most revolting excesses of 'class justice'. He also felt that some solution had to be found to the Slovak problem. Naturally, Novotny was in favour of reforms as long as they did not threaten his own and the Party's centralized power.

Thus the October plenum started quite innocently. However, everything was spoilt by a single, small technical hitch. One member of the Praesidium, Alexander Dubcek, raised an objection against Antonin Novotny. He complained that the documents and resolutions put before the meeting differed in a number of respects from those approved and agreed by the Praesidium. This was very strange behaviour on the part of the First Secretary, though only to be expected, he added. Dubcek went on to produce statistics suggesting that Slovakia was being continuously cheated in economic matters, particularly investment policy, and he claimed that Novotny had presided over these malpractices.

Novotny became very angry, as he usually did on the infrequent occasions when he was criticized. His answer amounted to this: if Dubcek felt Slovakia was getting a raw deal from Prague, very well, let a separate Czech National

Council be set up, a federal state created, and the two economies could go their own way with the Slovaks finding their own capital to invest; he, Novotny, was not in favour of this solution and wondered whether it was not inspired by some relic of 'bourgeois nationalism'.

At this, pandemonium broke out, and for the first time in twenty years a plenary session of the Central Committee was to witness an uncontrolled and uncontrollable discussion. A member for Brno, Josef Spacek (later one of the most liberal figures in the Praesidium) quoted the results of a survey by members of the Party in Southern Moravia, showing that the organization there was more or less disintegrating. Volenik, Secretary of the North Moravian Region, made a critical speech, and another came from Vodslon; Smrkovsky and Slavik deplored the official theses as 'optimistic and unrealistic'. Finally, the ominous phrase was heard: 'accumulation of offices'.

Novotny could scarcely believe his ears. At about the same time he heard that late in the afternoon of 31 October Prague University students had come out on to the streets and that a procession, clearly quite unpolitical at the start, was marching towards the Castle and hence, by a further coincidence, in the direction of the Central Committee session. It was getting on for eight o'clock. Celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution were about to start and a Party delegation under Novotny's leadership was due to leave for Moscow. The hardline group had what seemed to them a brilliant idea: the plenum would be interrupted for technical reasons, putting a stop to the discussions. Novotny tried to secure unanimous approval for the theses, but for the first time in the history of these meetings it was refused, thirteen members voting against the submission of the document to the Party organizations. Only eight votes were cast against a proposal to defer the plenum until December, and many supported it only to ensure that a firm date was set for the resumption of discussions - 12 December. Novotny and his friends had gained what they most badly needed: time to manoeuvre and intrigue. A period of feverish activity ensued for the two warring factions, who realized that this time it would be a fight to the finish. It does not seem that Novotny had any serious fears for his future yet. He expected great things of the trip to Moscow, mainly the

opportunity first to neutralize and then liquidate his opponents. When he arrived, however, Novotny found the leaders in Moscow far less favourably disposed than he had hoped. Indeed the situation was quite embarrassing. Brezhnev and his colleagues kept postponing political talks with him on a variety of pretexts. For the Soviet Embassy in Prague had simply not had time yet to report on the unexpected course taken by the October plenum. The Moscow leaders, with many other problems to worry about, had no great desire to get involved in the internal disputes of a traditionally faithful Communist Party, and finally sent Novotny home with a non-committal expression of confidence in his person and any further measures he might take.

On his return from Moscow Novotny fell ill, and Jiri Hendrych had an attack of heart trouble, so that the internal argument in the Party came to a halt. But only outwardly. Praesidium groups of varying composition met daily at the bedside of one or the other leader, and the prevailing mood favoured a quiet compromise. It was no longer possible, of course, to skirt round the issue of separating the offices of head of state and First Secretary, but this was commonly referred to as an unspecified 'principle' that 'required consideration'. Meanwhile, however, the Soviet Embassy had sent an urgent telegram to Moscow painting a picture of chaos and uncertainty in the Czechoslovak Communist Party. (Ambassador Chervonenko is quoted as having remarked in a private conversation that it was all because 'so few people had been hanged' during the fifties.) Then at the beginning of December the Embassy passed on an invitation from Novotny to Brezhnev, asking the Soviet Party leader to come to Prague as soon as possible. He arrived on 8 December. The official statement that he had come at the request of the whole Central Committee was of course untrue; not even the Praesidium members knew about the invitation.

Brezhnev refused to take part in a Praesidium meeting, but he did speak to individual members and argued forcibly in favour of Novotny retaining both his jobs. In private conversations Hendrych later said that the Soviets had no particular personal interest in Novotny's future; but the Soviet leaders, he pointed out, were 'weak and fearful of any change, scenting danger in

every concession'. The same source gave the opinion that Brezhnev, 'none too intelligent a man', was then fully in charge of ideological affairs in which chaos prevailed, whereas in economic matters, for which Kosygin was responsible, the outlook was indeed improving.

However, not even Brezhnev's intervention could silence those voices in the Czechoslovak Praesidium favouring separation of the two supreme posts, especially since the mood in the Central Committee at large was well known. The deadline for the deferred plenum was approaching, and the Praesidium had still reached no decision. It was not till the last moment that a further week's postponement was agreed, up to 19 December.

The session was finally opened by Novotny-supporter Lastovicka, who on behalf of the Praesidium proposed a two-point agenda: 1. Economic development problems. 2. Rearrangement of the leadership and relations between the main offices. Novotny opened the discussion of point 2 as follows:

To begin with I should like to exercise self-criticism in regard to my remarks at the October plenum. . .

That plenum featured a number of issues which left an unpleasant taste behind and which unfortunately, due to various distorted interpretations, have had repercussions inside the Party and in public life.

In this connection I feel I must say something about my own contribution. . . I have thought a lot about it and taken notes of the views of other comrades. I see now that my address was inept and ill-considered and was rightly criticized by a number of comrades. . .

The international situation is a complex one. . . The imperialists will not quit the world arena lightly. . . The future belongs to socialism; it is only a matter of time before we gain the upper hand and . . . finally overtake capitalism in the economic field. The imperialists understand this . . . Czechoslovakia faces a powerful attempt at ideological subversion; the West is pressing hard upon our country, as it is upon the German Democratic Republic and the other socialist states. The West seeks to thrust a wedge between us and weaken our unity. . .

For these reasons, comrades, we shall continue to weigh carefully every step we take; the Central Committee carries great responsibility.

It was at this point that Vodslon suddenly stood up and asked in a loud voice :

I beg of you comrades, what do you take us for? We have heard speeches from Comrades Lenart and Novotny. I do not know if they represented the agreed view of the Praesidium, but in any case I must ask why we should have to learn about the disagreements in the Praesidium from sources other than the Praesidium. In any case I must ask why we should have to learn about the disagreements exist. The foreign press has written about it, foreign radio summaries talk about it, only we are denied truthful information. Where is it laid down that the Praesidium should appear before the Central Committee with a unanimous opinion, when we know that it is not unanimous? That was made quite clear at the last Committee session . . . I think that comrades should state their own views when they address the Central Committee. They ought to say what really went on in the Praesidium. I read in the papers one day that the Central Committee had invited Comrade Brezhnev, and the next day that it was the Praesidium. I am a member of the Central Committee but I had been away ill for two weeks so I do not know. But these are basic questions, comrades. Even the public talks about them. . . We have got to express an opinion about these things for once, comrades. If we act like this we shall merely lose people's confidence.

With this, the cat was out of the bag. After a vain attempt by Lastovicka to stop the discussion, the debate developed in a dramatic way. The economist Ota Sik contributed a crushing review showing that without thoroughgoing changes in the political system it would be impossible to improve the economic situation, which was already catastrophic. Sik attacked not only Novotny, but the Party system itself. He suggested that in future it should be permitted to form factions within the Central Committee and to set up expert commissions with a decisive say in the management of affairs, so that even Secretaries of the Central Committee would be subordinated to them.

Comrades [he began], I wish to speak today not about economic matters but about certain political problems which I regard as paramount at this moment.

We have to admit that popular discontent with the present trend of society is growing. The last session of this Committee showed



that a large section of the Party appreciates the critical nature of the situation and sees the need for change. This is the time for decisive solution, if we are not to be held responsible one day for the inexcusable neglect of serious symptoms, for lack of courage to speak up at the moment of crisis. Most honest working people are baffled that we have failed for so long to deal with self-evident shortcomings. They are disorientated by the lack of specific information . . . and display increasing disinterest, hopelessness and an embarrassing tendency to withdraw into their private shells. The intelligentsia is registering its disapproval ever more publicly and vociferously. The part of society which reacts most sensitively of all, the young, is highly sceptical towards all political and economic measures. Their growing aversion has already, I am afraid, a partly anti-socialist character. It is no use washing our hands of them, comrades; they are the future pillars of the social order. With the general decline of interest and activity among Party members, which has to be made up for by the apparatus to an increasing extent, there is a haphazard search for causes and solutions on the part of both communists and non-communists, and a distrust in the effectiveness of Party resolutions. . .

If the Party is not to lose its authority entirely, if the economy is not to grow steadily worse and social conflicts are not to turn into a serious threat to socialist prospects, we must really knuckle down to a number of crucial measures. . .

The most important thing for us to carry out without delay, comrades, and in my view at this very session, is as follows :

We must eliminate the extreme accumulation of power in the hands of certain comrades, notably comrade Novotny, which I see as the greatest obstacle to a rapid recovery by the Party. The Praesidium has already decided in principle on the need . . . to separate the offices of President and First Secretary, but continues to postpone its actual implementation. I think it is wrong to tarry over this problem, for its solution is a precondition for other important changes and to restore a healthy atmosphere in the Party. . .

I accordingly propose, as our first act, to request comrade Novotny to resign the position of First Secretary, and to call upon the Central Committee to release him from this post.

As a second act I propose the immediate election of a commission of comrades enjoying the confidence of the majority, people of long Party experience whom we most respect for their bold and candid speeches on various occasions, or for their general good character in moments of stress, and whose behaviour has not

contributed to the strengthening of personal power on the part of this or that comrade. I have in mind such comrades – pray take note of my specific proposals, I may be wrong – as Bilak, Boruvka, Hrdinova, Indra, Fierlinger, Kriegel, Krosnar, Lorincz, Machacova, Piller, Rigo, Sedlakova, Slavik, Smrkovsky, Spacek, Vodslon, Volenik and Mikova. . . This commission should immediately set to and draft proposals for two candidates for the post of First Secretary, and for several new Praesidium members. . .

Thirdly, immediately after the election of these officials the Praesidium should be charged with drafting basic measures for the democratization of our Party, subject, however, to the further discussion of several main points. I would personally suggest the following guidelines :

First, a specific set of rules needs to be elaborated for the activities of the Central Committee, its Praesidium, Secretariat and commissions. The Central Committee itself must become genuinely, and not just formally, the supreme Party organ between congresses; the plenum must cease to be an assembly for unanimously approving cut-and-dried proposals by the Praesidium.

Second, the responsibility for special spheres of Party activity must lie not with individual officials, but with the Central Committee commissions . . . responsible to the Praesidium and the plenum of the Central Committee; the function of secretaries should be the running of their departments on behalf of the respective commissions. The activity of communists in the armed services and security forces should be governed by two independent commissions responsible to the Praesidium and to the plenum of the Central Committee; and no member of one of these two commissions should be a member of the other.

Third, the post of Central Committee Secretary is incompatible with the highest state offices – President of the Republic, Chairman of the National Assembly or any government minister. A Central Committee Secretary cannot serve for more than two periods of office, unless in exceptional cases the Central Committee gives its assent by secret ballot to a third.

Fourth, all elections are to be secret. . .

Fifth, the Central Committee's code of procedure should also cover *cadre policy* which must not be employed to strengthen the position of particular individuals. . .

Furthermore, the Praesidium should be adjourned to draft a short-term Political and Economic Action Programme, to enable the Party to deal as quickly as possible with the accumulation of urgent problems concerning the organization and working methods

of the state, the management of the economy, culture and other important social fields.

Sik's speech met with a cold reception, as was only to be expected in a Central Committee still consisting largely of hardline officials. However, such members as Smrkovsky, Spacek, Boruvka, Volenik and even some conservatives (Fierlinger and Dolansky) added their own criticisms of Antonin Novotny, pointed out his personal responsibility for the crisis of state and Party and demanded his resignation as First Secretary. Comrade Vodslon stressed that . . . 'the Party has developed into a paramount institution of power, and is even entrenched as such in the Constitution and laws of the country. . . I am not sure that we need this under socialism. . .'

Some speakers such as Oldrich Rakosnik, on the other hand, opposed Sik's suggestions on the grounds that they would . . . 'confuse' the workers, and in addition 'play into the enemy's hands'.

When the second day's session opened (20 December) Lenart tried to patch things up on behalf of the Praesidium. He deplored the 'fantastic rumours circulating abroad and among certain circles at home, tending to dramatize the Praesidium's dealings'. As for Sik's proposals, these 'go beyond our statutes' and the plenum was not competent to decide on such matters, still less to 'vote on them on the spot, which would violate the scientific character of Party work'. Sik had 'expressed many opinions without support of facts or arguments' and 'employed a method which ought not to be customary in comradely relations'.

Lenart's efforts failed. Vaclav Slavik immediately challenged him to say in what point Sik had 'gone beyond the statutes' and Lenart was unable to answer.

Another speaker was Vasil Bilak, a member of the Praesidium who was later to play a highly ambiguous role in the Party's dealings with Soviet representatives. In December, however, he criticized Novotny very openly, and complained that the press had not mentioned many of the subjects Novotny had touched on at the September plenum. 'The Party's rank and file are adult and want clear answers,' said Bilak. And then, turning to Czech-Slovak relations, he added:

Those comrades who have studied the Party archives at the

Barnabite Monastery were amazed to read that only four months after the proclamation of the 'Magna Carta of the Slovak nation' at the joint meeting of the two Parties on 17-18 July 1945 one of the authors of that Magna Carta, comrade Kopecky, proposed the dissolution of the Slovak national institutions. . . . As evidence of a wave of anti-Czech feeling in Slovakia Kopecky at the same joint meeting had adduced the argument 'that at the Pan Slav Day celebration at Devin the comrades from Prague had been given smaller portions of meat than the Slovak. . .'. Such was the evidence upon which the fictitious charge of nationalism and distrust was gradually built and, in the end, the quest for enemies in our own ranks.

Bilak then proceeded with an impressive review of the mistakes, sometimes of an arrogant nature, committed by Novotny and his clique in their policies for Slovakia. The Slovak Party and autonomous administrative organs were 'bypassed as a rule'. In March 1966 (during a plenary session of the Central Committee in Prague) Novotny had said in the corridors that in accepting the Kosice government programme they had made 'a mistake'.\* Still according to Bilak, Novotny considered Slovak national aspirations 'bourgeois nationalism' and did not recognize the Slovaks as a nation. When (on 8 April 1963) Alexander Dubcek was elected First Secretary of the Slovak Communist Party, this fact 'was not allowed to be publicized for several months'; after that, 'comrade Novotny did not even once take part at the discussions of the plenum or of the Praesidium of the Slovak Communist Party's Central Committee'. In the case of the so-called Slovak 'bourgeois nationalists' Novotny had behaved shamefully: although he had later voted for the resolution of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Party in December 1963, proclaiming that the charges against the Slovak Communists had been trumped up; a month later, he declared (to quote Bilak) 'that the resolution was invalid . . . as, indeed, this particular document was quickly rescinded in the regional and district praesidia of the Party'. Finally, Bilak declared that Novotny considered Slovakia 'the soft underbelly of the Republic', that he did not trust the leadership of the Slovak party with Dubcek at its head, and that

\*This first post-war Czechoslovak government programme was proclaimed in the Slovak town of Kosice. It stipulated that Slovakia should have full administrative autonomy within the framework of the Czechoslovak Republic.

he blamed the latter for everything that happened in Bratislava. But, 'who is responsible for the mistakes committed in Prague?' Bilak asked insistently.

Thus, the second day of the Central Committee discussion wound up badly for Novotny. It became clear that he had been abandoned even by those on whose support (or at least neutrality) he had counted. Consequently, Novotny came to the conclusion that a further tactical retreat was inevitable but also not entirely without hope. By such a move he would gain what he needed most – time. For this reason, at the opening of the third, fateful day of the plenary session (on 21 December) Novotny addressed the meeting :

. . . I should like to stress again that I received both the post of First Secretary, and that of President of the Republic, at the hands of the Central Committee of our Party. In 1957 the Central Committee considered how to ensure fulfilment of the Party's will in the situation prevailing after the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Party. . . Even then I resisted the combination of the two offices pointing out the difficulties and problems it would impose on me. . . Then again when I was re-elected President in 1964 . . . I asked [comrades in the Praesidium] that if ever they should find me unable to perform both functions adequately . . . they should tell me so quite frankly. I repeat what I said at the Praesidium meeting, that I put my office as First Secretary at the disposal of the plenum of the Central Committee. . . I shall accept any decision that the Central Committee makes. . . I have always done what the appropriate organs of the Party decided and carried out the work assigned to me. The Party's interest has always been paramount for me, and still is. There will no doubt be a place and a time for me to say something myself about questions of Party work, for I cannot forgo the right to reply to certain remarks made in the discussion about my own activities.

It was Dubcek who then announced to the plenum that on the previous day the Praesidium had 'accepted Novotny's suggestion that he would give up his post as First Secretary and let the Central Committee appoint someone else', but he also suggested that a nomination for the post should not be made till 3 January.

In retrospect, it is clear that the fate of the Prague Spring was in the balance at this particular moment. Novotny's plan was simple : to put the office of First Secretary at their disposal,

leaving the arena open for a fight over the succession; then prolong the period of uncertainty and intrigue, and dramatize to such a degree that drastic interventions would become necessary (either by Czechoslovak armed and police forces, or by Moscow, possibly by a combination of both); in this way, everything would finally return to the old groove. To achieve this, a respite was essential. Even if a change in the top post could not be avoided, then let it be the *only* change; with the majority of Novotny's supporters in the Central Committee and the powerful Party apparatus behind him, it would be easy to manipulate and neutralize the First Secretary.

At this crucial moment the situation was saved by a member of the Central Committee, at that time a modest Minister of Forestry and Water Administration, an old communist who had been thrown into jail in the early fifties on charges of 'rightist deviation': Josef Smrkovsky, the man who was soon to become a popular personality of the Prague Spring, a faithful friend of Alexander Dubcek, loved in Prague, and hated in Moscow, who was to be humiliated (in September 1969) together with his friend Alexander. At the Central Committee's plenum, two days before Christmas, Smrkovsky expressed his resolute disagreement with the move to postpone such important discussions till after the holidays. Smrkovsky had excellent reasons for this opinion which he gave in a long address. In view of its importance, it is quoted here at some length :

I have the feeling that we are experiencing one of those critical moments in the history of our Party which will decide for a long time to come whether it will progress or petrify. So we should consider carefully . . . what the essence of the crisis is. Is it the result of unfettered personal ambitions, of inter-group fighting, of irresponsible actions by Secretaries, or of national hypersensitiveness among Slovak Communists, as some people suggest? Or is our argument a manifestation of objective processes whose understanding and solution is of vital concern to the Party and to the whole of Czech and Slovak society? I am not so naive as to ignore the role of personal and other factors, but I do think that our disagreements are primarily a reflection of objective processes and social needs. . .

The Slovak problem is one of the chief factors in this argument, a factor which came to the surface at the moment when comrade Dubcek's speech at the October plenum was stigmatized as

nationalistic. Great objection was taken to this description, not merely by the Slovak members of the Central Committee, but by many Czech ones too. . .

Another serious topic is our relationship with the Soviet Union. . . Friendship and alliance with the Soviet Union and the Soviet Communist Party, based on complete equality, mutual respect and independence, is and will remain one of the basic planks of our Party and state policy. I was therefore very disturbed by comrade Chudik's suggestion that Soviet comrades should be consulted in connection with our decision. Does this mean we are to involve Soviet comrades in our own quarrels? Are we to make them arbitrators in favour of one particular solution, and so in fact saddle them with some of the responsibility? Would that be good for our Party and our country? Would that add to the Soviet Union's prestige in our country or promote Czechoslovak-Soviet friendship? . . . We cannot permit in our Party that any individual or group should arrogate the right to stand as a kind of guarantor of our relationship with the Soviet Union. . .

The same applies, I think, to another question that has been raised here, the question of who represents the interests of our working class. . . No single individual or group of Party members can claim a monopoly right to defend the interest of the workers and to incorporate the working-class traditions of our Party. . . Nor is it right to describe our arguments as a conflict between workers and intellectuals among the Party leaders. . . Any tendency to set workers against intellectuals is highly harmful and alien to the whole tradition of our revolutionary Party. . .

The Party must create the conditions for a renewal, if I may so put it, of that enthusiastic spirit of 1948 and pre-1948 which we remember so well. This naturally requires changes, including changes at the top. That is the objective basis for our arguments, which have become centred on the demand for personnel changes in the Praesidium.

A far more complicated matter . . . is the separation of the posts of President and First Secretary. . . I have come to the conclusion that this separation should be accomplished without delay, for reasons that are quite objective. In the first place comrade Novotny . . . as the highest official with the greatest concentration of power, bears the greatest responsibility for the present state of affairs. . . . Secondly, it is unsatisfactory that an excessive number of duties should be piled upon one pair of shoulders. . .

There are also some topical reasons for this. Some comrades feel uncertain about what would happen if no changes were made after

all the criticisms that had been expressed. . . Many are afraid, not without reason when one considers certain past experiences, that there might be a certain relapse into the methods of the fifties, with strong measures being taken against opponents inside the Party. . . That would involve a most serious danger for the whole Republic. . .

All these facts have led me to conclude that the decisions about the First Secretary's post should be made now, *at this plenum*. I have not reached this view hurriedly; I have considered whether the whole thing could not be left until the Party's Fourteenth Congress. . . Even before December I discussed my feelings with comrade Novotny when he invited me to talk with him. I urged him at the time to make the proposal of splitting the two offices to the Central Committee himself. . . He did not do so, and I much regret this. To put your office at the Committee's disposal, comrade Novotny, is one thing. To lay it down and say, 'For various good reasons I will not hold it any more and I want the Central Committee to appoint a successor' – that would be quite different. . . I would put a resolution, comrade Novotny, if you would only accept it, for you have two hours to consider the matter. All of us, I think, would give you two hours, or as long as you wanted – I would anyway, and vote for it with both hands! Come and tell us that you appreciate the need to solve the situation and split the offices. I am sure you would find full understanding among us here in the Central Committee. But if things go on the way they have been going, I am very much afraid of the consequences. . .

Smrkovsky's speech set off a long and excited debate the like of which the Central Committee had not witnessed for twenty years. A few members – Nemeč, Indra, Leflerova, Mestek, Trojan and others – proposed an adjournment, for which no doubt they had good reasons. Others were more subtle; Ladislava Besserova, for example, pleaded on behalf of the women present who had Christmas cooking on their minds and suggested that 'we can perfectly well continue the discussion on 3 January.' Dubček on the contrary pointed out that only twenty-two of the sixty-two members who had put their names down to speak had so far had the floor. Chudík came to the defence of Novotny, who was (he put it) 'to be sacrificed for the benefit of a few dissatisfied philosophers, a handful of writers and sundry elements'. 'I am scared,' he added, 'at some of the tones and undertones we have heard, which would give our Party



a quite different character from that it has enjoyed throughout its whole magnificent fifty years' history.' Dubcek then announced from the chair that Novotny had asked for the floor as a matter of privilege.

Novotny now urged that members attend first to the backlog of urgent practical decisions concerning the Slovak National Council, the National Assembly, various ministerial arrangements, etc. whose further postponement would cause public dismay, and deal with the Party personnel questions at the plenums scheduled for February and March. Meanwhile he had a complaint to make.

I do not accept, comrades – I shall be quite frank about this, and return to the matter later – I cannot accept lessons about personal character and Leninist norms from people, even from members of the Central Committee, whose past activity does not entitle them to it, as the Party Control Commission could testify. Mark my words, comrades.

Kolder, in contrast, proposed at this point that the plenum's wish should be met and that all members of the Praesidium and Secretariat should 'close their accounts' individually. This was accepted. Kolder then summed up the situation inside the Party as chaotic, blaming this on the methods used for 'securing implementation of the official line' and on 'the intolerable atmosphere in the Secretariat', where certain Secretaries enjoyed privileged positions and intrigue and suspicion were rife. He complained that work on the first revision of the 1948–54 trials, which Kolder had himself taken over in 1962, had been sabotaged, and official secretiveness had led to the publication in the West of a short version of the report produced after several months' work in the Barnabite Monastery archives by a 25-man Party commission. (The full version, a far longer document, had so far been kept restricted in the Central Committee archives, he assured members.)

Comrade Hendrych gave the opinion that the healthy development of the Party had been interrupted by 'a small group of writers, mostly communists I am afraid, who proffered opinions directly opposed to Party policy'. This in turn 'stimulated the enemies of socialism', witness the writers' manifesto, Mnacko's

campaign, the 'links with émigrés' and so forth. Unfortunately, Hendrych noted, 'comrade Novotny's nervousness had also become more acute'; he criticized the First Secretary's speeches of August and September 1967 for their 'lack of subtlety'. His decision to vote against Novotny in the Praesidium, he said, had 'not been sudden, but matured slowly'. The Party should draft a new Action Programme by the end of October.

The session resumed after lunch with a self-critical speech from Martin Vaculik, while Stefan Sadovsky by contrast said there was no crisis in the Party at all. The following appeal to ethics and sensibility then came from Antonin Kapek.

I should like to ask comrade Novotny to prevent further discussion and pouring out of filth which nobody can justify by his statements here, by his exemplary courage and loyal communist attitude. I can promise the Central Committee that I shall never in my whole life speak about any negative traits in the First Secretary, for I have no wish to speak against the Party and against unity. I shall always speak about comrade Novotny's successes and his efforts and I feel convinced it rests purely with him whether we all behave like that. . .

The Praesidium's scope for action was now 'minimal', Oldrich Cernik assured the plenum. Following the October plenum 'too many things had leaked out of Praesidium meetings not by anyone's intention, perhaps, but people do talk too much.' The combination of the two supreme offices had been justified in its time, he thought, and one should not fall for any 'one-sided estimate of comrade Novotny. . . I am sure for my own part, comrades, that as time goes on comrade Novotny will see who really meant well and acted sincerely both towards him and towards the Party.'

Dubcek declared that he was exhausted and unwell. He insisted that the important thing to remember about the Slovaks was that they were 'living together with the Czechs of their own free will', and that they would only get what they fought for.

The debate dragged on and time grew short, which suited the hardliners who wanted the decision postponed. Vilem Novy proposed that the session be adjourned till January, and that the Praesidium together with the representatives of the regions be charged with drafting a solution for the accumulation-of-posts

question and a reform of Party working methods, as well as with putting forward a new candidate for the post of First Secretary. After several rather confused speeches from the floor Dubcek put the proposal to adjourn to the vote; it was accepted with five abstentions. The proposal for a consultative group was passed unanimously. Novotny now had practically a week in which to take some firm action; he used it to make his most serious mistakes. He overdid everything; both his preparations for liquidating opponents and his efforts to threaten or bribe potential allies (army officers received a thousand crowns' bonus just before the crisis). A great campaign to buy souls was started everywhere while Novotny took more and more into his own hands. It turned out that Lefflerova and Besserova, instead of worrying about Christmas cakes, had jumped into their official cars and, together with other comrades, started a tour of the provinces to win local officials over. They warned everybody that socialism and the Party would be in jeopardy unless Novotny retained all his offices.

Obscure plans were also being hatched by the Eighth (Security) Department of the Central Committee and by circles close to the Party organization in the Defence Ministry. During December a number of reservists had been called up without warning and manoeuvres had been held in several parts of Bohemia which might or might not have been pure military exercises. Certain militia units were put on the alert for a period of several months and an exercise was scheduled for 12 December in Prague. The result was quite amusing, for at this point the main political administration of the armed forces under General Prchlik intervened and diverted the militia units to the Military Academy in Dejvice and to the Party High School building in Vokovice, on the grounds that there they would be instantly available for action. There they ate and drank day after day, waiting for the moment that never came. When everything was over they returned home and only then realized that they had virtually been Prchlik's prisoners the whole time.

Meanwhile uncertainty reigned at the Defence Ministry. The Party organization there had a meeting on 19 December, the first day of the Central Committee plenum. Sensational rumours circulated and a certain General Sejna was foremost in promoting them. He claimed that a 'hostile faction' had been uncovered

in the leadership, consisting of Dubcek, Kolder, Cernik, Dolansky and Hendrych, and that Novotny had avowed he would 'smash' it. The army must not stand idly by, Sejna said, arguing that the defence forces had always been expected to play 'a certain role' in complex domestic situations.

It became apparent later that these rumours were both exaggerated and premature. On the same day, 19 December, General Martin Dzur (later to become Defence Minister) rang General Pepich (who was to succeed Prchlik), who in turn warned his friends, the 'reliable' officers on the General Staff. They effectively frustrated the conspiracy in the nick of time. On 2 January General Janko, who committed suicide as announced later, summoned a number of commanding officers to Prague. The plan was apparently for a tank brigade to move on Prague at a predetermined moment; this was to be the signal for a counterblow by Novotny's people and a nocturnal police razzia against their opponents. For this purpose Mamula, head of the Central Committee's Security Department, drew up a list of people to be arrested. This list, drafted with the assistance of officials in the army and security forces, was approved by Novotny. Exactly 1,032 arrest warrants were issued, signed by Kudrna as Minister of the Interior and by State Prosecutor Bartuska. Mamula was merely to fill in the dates when they were needed. (Questioned later before the Central Committee, he insisted that this was normal practice and that open-dated arrest warrants were held ready in every country for dealing with people suspected of anti-state machinations.) The intended victims included Central Committee members Dubcek, Cernik, Smrkovsky, Sik, Vodslon, Sedlakova, Spacek and many others; Generals Dzur, Prchlik and their associates; certain officials of the Party's central organs and of the non-communist 'social organization', many communist writers, artists, journalists, students and so on. (When Novotny fell in January, Mamula's men destroyed a great deal of compromising material in the Party headquarters, the Defence Ministry and the President's Chancellery. Photostat copies of the arrest warrants, however, were preserved.)

The pro-Novotny forces were to strike at the beginning of January. When Novotny delayed the convocation of the plenum, however, his opponents smelt trouble. Finally Kolder rang

Novotny with a form of ultimatum : if Novotny did not convene the Central Committee, he, Kolder, would do so on a crisis footing. Accordingly Novotny summoned the Committee for 3 January.

On 5 January, while it was sitting, a meeting took place at 7.30 in the morning on the third floor of the Defence Ministry, composed of the main Party committee in that organization with a number of senior officers from the Ministry also attending. The main point on the agenda was a letter addressed to the Committee stating that 'communists in the armed forces do not approve of the division of the offices of President and First Secretary', on the grounds that the international situation 'does not permit such changes'. Generals Sejna and Janko showed signs of nervousness as the debate went on, but when a vote was taken almost the whole meeting favoured the sending of the letter. (The generals who subsequently took the letter to the Castle arrived to find that Dubcek had already been elected First Secretary. Nothing daunted, they left the letter in its briefcase and were in fact the first group of visitors to congratulate Dubcek on his appointment!)

At the Central Committee Plenum, meanwhile, Novotny had started off with a mild exercise in self-criticism and renewed his offer to hand over his Party post if anyone had doubts about his performance. Comrade Sedlakova from Bratislava shouted out that it was the Central Committee which conferred posts and the Central Committee which decided when to take them away again. The atmosphere rapidly became heated and some of the hesitators joined those who were already overtly critical. (It is alleged that comrades such as the former Minister of Information, Hoffmann, had two or three versions of their 'contributions to the discussion' ready, one favouring Novotny, one against him, and one non-committal.)

As the argument raged an increasing number of members favoured separation of the supreme offices : but not all. Defence Minister Lomsky, for example, pointed to the international dangers surrounding the Republic, such as German revanchism, and concluded that the moment was not ripe for such grave changes. The Chief of General Staff, General Rytir, spoke even more dramatically; he claimed he had just received intelligence

reports of an 'increased threat' to the country from abroad. General Pchlik, on the other hand, argued sarcastically that the last speech showed how incapable some comrades were of using the information entrusted to them, and how they oversimplified or exaggerated it to suit their purposes. It was embarrassing, he said, to hear such nonsense from the mouth of the chief of Czechoslovak intelligence, and he hinted that the army was aware of strange preparations going on suggesting the possibility of the defence forces being misused in an internal Party conflict.

The clumsiest move – and it cost him half of his political career – came from Lenart, who asked what other socialist countries would think if Novotny resigned. He even read out passages from a threatening memorandum by Ulbricht, which provoked cries of disgust and mirth. To crown everything Vaclav David, the Foreign Minister, none too intelligent but at least an undisguised Moscow agent, tried to demonstrate with quotations from the foreign press that any criticism within the Party was welcome fuel to the Western imperialists, adding that 'imperialism has high hopes of the economic reform proposals.' David was promptly hooted down by the economists in the Central Committee.

Opening the second day's session (4 January), Oldrich Cernik announced that the Praesidium had come to the decision overnight that the question of separating the supreme offices must be decided that day. Accordingly the Praesidium had called upon Novotny to draft appropriate conclusions in cooperation with the consultative group, in readiness for the evening session. The Praesidium would then 'make recommendations for further action' the following day.

All through the night of 4–5 January the consultative group argued and negotiated, above all with Novotny himself who obstinately rejected almost every candidate that was suggested, Smrkovsky and Sik most vehemently of all. His own proposals for the succession – Lastovicka, Lenart, Martin Vaculik – were in turn unacceptable to the consultative group. And so it went on. When Cernik's name cropped up, the candidate himself was uninterested; he was more eager to be premier, and a combination of both jobs was after all no longer possible. So Cernik put forward a name that had not been considered till then : Dubcek.

After a little hesitation Novotny decided to back this sugges-

tion. He had two reasons for this. First, Dubcek was a Slovak so that the choice might seem too radical and 'inappropriate' to the Czech members of the Central Committee; then there would be no agreement and the dispute would drag on, giving Novotny's group time for further manoeuvring. Second, Dubcek was known to be a hesitant and somewhat timid personality, a man of compromise whom they could probably manipulate. To Novotny's way of thinking this was another point in Dubcek's favour.

Dubcek himself was at first reluctant, however. He realized the enormity of his task and of the responsibility he would have to assume. He insisted from the outset that he did not wish it to appear that his original fracas with Novotny in October had been due to personal motives. He urged that collective leadership and collective decision-making be upheld.

All these developments transpired during the night of 4-5 January. At 9.12 a.m. Kolder told the plenum from the chair that the Praesidium and the consultative group together had reached 'unanimous conclusions', the nature of which would now be explained by Novotny.

Right from the start of our discussions in the Praesidium [he said] I made clear that in order to make things easier both for the Praesidium and the whole Committee I would stand up in the plenum and put the office of First Secretary at the Party's disposal. I did this to ensure that discussion was not restricted by any feeling that my own person was an obstacle to free decision-making, any idea that the First Secretary's post was tied to me personally. At the same time I declared that I was in favour of separating the offices of First Secretary and President of the Republic. And I stress, comrades, that I am still of this opinion. . . I ask, in line with our discussions in the Praesidium and with my own conviction, that I should be relieved of the office of First Secretary, and I say quite frankly that I do so in the interest of Party unity, and I hope my decision will be understood in this spirit.

I also wish to put forward in the Praesidium's name and in accordance with the view of the consultative group and with my own preference the unanimous proposal that comrade Dubcek should be chosen as First Secretary. . . My own feeling, comrades, and I know a good deal of thought was given to these appointments - is that a good and happy choice has been made, that in

comrade Dubcek's person we have a guarantee that . . . his work will lead to a reinforcement of unity. . .

Kolder now assured the meeting from the chair that Novotny would remain the 'Workers' President', continue to hold high office and lend every assistance to the new First Secretary. Asked by Kozelka whether any thought had been given to the possibility of Novotny remaining First Secretary and relinquishing the presidential office, he replied that the original proposal had been unanimous. Jiraskova urged acceptance of the Praesidium's proposal so that the session could end with everyone in agreement.

Another fifty Committee members were down to speak, but to hasten the vote a number withdrew their names: Kriegel, Machacova, Havlin, Havlicek, Kuba, Spacek, Prchlik, Novy (the last named asked that 'Novotny's achievements' should be accorded due recognition). Pavlovsky and Salgovic, who were to emerge as traitors eight months later, protested against the decision. Pavlovsky warned against the 'international repercussions' of Novotny's resignation and asked that other communist parties, particularly the Soviet, should be immediately informed 'by internal channels', since there was clearly going to be a change of policy in the Czechoslovak Party.

Other members also withdrew their names, yet the debate still went on. Some, like Nepomucky and Stoll, felt it necessary to recall the 'early revolutionary years' of the Party, others agreed with the proposal but wanted to make various supplementary points. The hesitators, however, were coming round in favour of Dubcek, for they could now see clearly how things were going to end up. Finally he was voted in as First Secretary unanimously. These are some characteristic passages from his speech of thanks:

I shall try to be brief. I should like to say, comrades, what I have said in the Praesidium and to the consultative group when I was proposed as a candidate, and I should like to repeat it at least in part to you: anyone who knows me will realize this is one of the hardest decisions I have ever had to make. I do not have to explain this: you will understand it yourselves and in any case I would find it hard to express before this plenum. This is something that affects one's state of mind so much; as I have



already said, I do not know how I shall feel after a lapse of time . . .

As for our Czech comrades here and all Czech working men, I should like to say – as it were through the man-in-the-street, my brother-in-law Vasek and my uncle in Slany – well, that I shall continue to do everything I can to strengthen our unity, the unity of our indivisible Czechoslovak state, and to do everything for what has always been the keynote of our Party's policy – all-round reinforcement of relations with the Soviet Communist Party and the parties of the other countries in the socialist camp: to put it simply, I shall exert every possible effort to work towards the aims which the Central Committee has always held under the leadership of comrade Novotny. . .

I realize, comrades, that everything depends on the collective. . . We talked about this in the Praesidium . . . as the most important thing a man can rely on in his work: the collective. And that includes, last but not least, the assistance of comrade Novotny which he has promised me – and that of course is something I value. . . I would like to thank comrade Novotny for the work he has done . . . all these years; there is no doubt he has tried to the best of his conscience to make his contribution to the fulfilment of our Party's policy.

Comrades, thank you for your expression of confidence.

In the afternoon, four new Praesidium members were elected to strengthen Dubcek's position – Josef Spacek, Josef Boruvka, Emil Rigo and Jan Piller. Finally, the exhausted plenum approved the text of a resolution later described by Ota Sik as 'extremely toothless. . . We were trying mainly to avoid making a sensation, to get a political grip on things and avoid chaos, to inform the public by gradual steps. That was probably a mistake; we should have provided more accurate and worthwhile information from the start.'

The session was wound up by Kolder, who, having asserted that its proceedings 'despite their complexity, confirmed the unity of the Central Committee in fulfilling the general line approved at the Thirteenth (1966) Congress and reinforcing the application of Leninist norms in the Party's life', called upon everyone to sing the Internationale. Which they did, ending at 3.57 p.m. on 5 January 1968.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 'BE WITH US'—BUT HOW?

Sík's criticism of the final resolution was an understatement. It no longer contained the provision in the original draft that the Central Committee should in future exercise 'a decisive control over all other Party organs', i.e. including the Praesidium. Instead, the Praesidium was now to play a responsible part in 'elaborating and fulfilling Central Committee resolutions', it was to 'formulate new ideas, keep the Central Committee regularly informed, to call upon the Central Committee plenum to state its view on all its activities and in the case of internal disagreement to inform the plenum of the viewpoints of the individual members of the Praesidium'.

The information which was handed down to Party officials about the December and January sessions of the Central Committee was not merely inaccurate but completely distorted. This was of course the intention of circles close to Novotny, and of others too, who did not see themselves as completely vanquished. Local and district organizations of the Party at first knew nothing of what had transpired except that Dubcek had replaced Novotny. This was especially true in the countryside, where the impression was that a few personnel changes had occurred 'up there' and that everything would continue as before. But in Prague too there was plenty of indignation at the lack of official candour. Vilem Novy, who gave a report to a meeting of the Party organization at the Central Committee's Political High School, was shouted down and promised to hold another meeting to which he would come 'better prepared'. The meeting demanded, however, that they should be told about developments by a Praesidium member, Jiri Hendrych himself, who had after all been responsible for two purges at the school, of which Milan

Hubl, the former Vice-Rector, had been the most prominent victim.\*

Again Jiri Hajek, the future Foreign Minister, met with a stormy reception at the meeting of Party representatives of the Prague University faculties because of his over-cautious presentation. The meeting, at which the chief spokesman was the lecturer Frantisek Samalik, proceeded very democratically to elect a 12-member commission which drafted a strong resolution calling, among other things, for the resignation of Novotny from his presidential post too.

The wave of protests from 'below' about the distorted picture given of the Central Committee debates greatly increased as a result of instigation from leading figures like Smrkovsky, who realized, rather late in the day, that their own fate was menaced by the ignorance of junior officials and the pretence of 'continuity' in Party policy. Moreover, there was considerable uncertainty in the top ranks. Dubcek himself was hesitant and postponed any basic statement of his programme till February, meanwhile devoting sixteen or more hours a day to reading and listening to reports at the Secretariat. In view of this, and of the promise Dubcek had made to Brezhnev just after his appointment that there would be no more radical personnel changes, it is hardly surprising that hardliners like David, Lomsky, Pastyrik or Lastovicka felt quite safe in their ministerial or Party seats. Men with discouraging records like Erban, Duris, Auersperg and others began to speak up and offer their dubious talents to the new leader. As the phrase ran in Secretariat circles throughout January, 'the situation was obscure.'

And so, the Prague Spring got off to a slow start in the Party. The vast majority of Party members lived under the impression that little had happened except for a probably inevitable change at the top. Others were frankly indifferent ('comrades have just switched roles, everything will remain the same, anyhow'). At the *same time*, however, in the cultural weeklies and soon in the press in general, on radio and television, a political debate of the first order quickly developed. The Communist Party, its past and future, the differences between 'democratization' and democracy

\*He was sacrificed again in 1969. Because of his support of the Dubcek policy, the Central Committee plenary session in May 1969 resolved to investigate Hubl's activities. He was excluded from the Party in September 1969.

all came under discussion; there was in addition the problem of Slovakia, the serious difficulties of the economy, and the problem of justice and legality in a state where the government had little to decide since the Party leadership was the source of all power and where it, as was only too obvious, had been greatly misused. The First Secretary, however, remained silent. At times he realized that this silence and lack of any definite programme 'created a vacuum which made political work difficult' (Dubcek's speech on 16 March 1968). As early as February, Smrkovsky urged that it was imperative to separate the jurisdiction of the Party from that of the government, and that it was necessary to strengthen the influence of the Central Committee as a collective decision-making body. In addition, the Party's information policy was all wrong: the people had to be truthfully and fully informed about developments in the country.

Dubcek's hesitation proved fatal for him. While the First Secretary talked in foggy terms about problems concerning domestic and foreign policies, the public debate was already far ahead. For example: while (at the February Congress of Agricultural Cooperatives) he spoke in generalities about 'the cooperation of all social groups and classes', and repeated most of the slogans of the Novotny era in the part of the speech devoted to international affairs, a Party official in the South Moravian region was publicly criticizing the well-known premise of the Party's 'leading role' in the state. He declared that the 'government's duty is to govern whereas a Party must not rule the country even if it is the Communist Party . . . this party, in any case, does not represent all citizens . . . and on behalf of these citizens only those organs which were freely elected by the citizens can speak. . .'

Finally, these exciting and novel discussions concerning the role of the Party infiltrated Party organizations from top to bottom. The floodgates of criticism were opened even in closely-knit Party cells where no one had dared to raise their voice against the official line for years. Officials who claimed that no change was envisaged started to resign in fear of exposure. The annual meetings at district and regional level became a free-for-all in which the winners were not always more capable or honest than the losers, but in the process at least the most intolerable of the old gang were purged.

A second factor was the new freedom of commentary exercised by journalists in the press, radio, television and news films. The Party leaders, instead of trying to hinder them, even agreed to provide quite detailed accounts of Praesidium and Central Committee meetings. The result was a regular explosion of information and free opinion, which raised an enthusiastic echo throughout the country among people whom the Party had vainly tried to stir into political activity for two decades. People found themselves 'socially involved' almost overnight which led them to take a close, interested look at those who had taken the initiative.

The new Party leaders, meanwhile, were taken by surprise. As the 'Prague Spring' burst around them, they found themselves unable to keep up with the stream of questions put to them by the public, and particularly by TV and radio journalists. One issue led to another as the political onion was unpeeled layer by layer; people watched their television screens spellbound and fought to buy newspapers. They even began to send signed letters to the press and to telephone their views to the radio. Commentators and announcers suddenly acquired a popularity hitherto reserved for hockey champions: one of the best-loved, Milan Weiner, found a notice 'Weiner for President!' pinned to his office door.

One outstanding result of the period was the exposure of further violations of justice dating from the Novotny period, which led to a more rapid and legally correct rehabilitation of the victims, communist and non-communist alike. The journalists and the new leaders joined forces in furthering this process, which was aimed against those who had carried out the barbarities of the fifties even if they were not those ultimately responsible.

By early March it was already clear that the Czechoslovak 'rebirth' was going to be a far more profound affair than had seemed possible when the process began with the palace revolution in the Party leadership. The leaders themselves had never imagined that the nation-wide response to their invitation to 'discuss the state of the nation' would threaten their own position. When the waves of criticism began to lash against Novotny's second, presidential, office the popular interest coincided with that of the new team at the top. Novotny

pretended to be deaf to the clamour; for a long time he was assisted in his reluctance to abandon the post by the 1960 Constitution, which contained no provision for removing the President. The Party put its weight behind a growing press and radio campaign which castigated the men of the past still occupying the highest posts, but never mentioned Novotny by name. It is after all a tricky matter to criticize an irremovable head of state, let alone to accuse him of crimes against humanity.

In the midst of this quandary came the Sejna affair. General Ian Sejna, a farmer by trade, had belonged to the Party since 1945, joined the army five years later, become a Member of Parliament and candidate member of the Central Committee in 1954 and risen to be the most powerful Party general in the Defence Ministry, where he acted as the mainstay of Mamula and his dreaded Eighth Department of the Central Committee. On 27 February 1968 Prague Radio suddenly announced that he had been deprived of his parliamentary immunity for embezzling some 300,000 crowns, but had not been arrested because he had meanwhile fled the country.

However, the matter was not as simple as that. It was made quite clear in the press, and later at Central Committee sessions, that Sejna, Janko and a few other generals had plotted an intervention by the army in the Party's internal affairs, and done so in conjunction with Mamula and with the knowledge of General Lomsky, Rytir and the President of the Republic.

The Sejna affair quickly blew up into a major scandal. Press, radio and television vied in exposing details of the life of this playboy officer, personal friend of the Novotnys, father and son, boon companion of Soviet and other Warsaw Pact generals, who had been able to leave the country in an official vehicle together with his son and his son's fiancée and proceed via Hungary and Yugoslavia into Italy and thence to Washington.

However, this was a most welcome development. From that moment requests for Novotny's resignation began to pour in from Party branches. Yet it was not till 22 March that the radio was able to announce that the Praesidium had accepted Novotny's resignation for reasons of health on the previous day. The operation was a tricky one. The Praesidium of the National Assembly had first to request the Praesidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party to coerce Novotny into

resigning, and to threaten a vote of no confidence by the National Assembly if he did not, before the dictator realized that his days were numbered.

A week later Novotny had to relinquish his position in the Party Praesidium and Secretariat too. This happened at a Central Committee plenum at which he had arrived in his official car complete with bodyguard. His evident bad temper was not improved when he noticed a group of reporters and cameramen on the steps of the Central Committee building, itching to report his appearance. 'Take their names and have them arrested!' he shouted to his bodyguard, but even they had ceased to obey him. The same plenum approved the candidature of General Svoboda as the next President.

Following Novotny's resignation from the Presidency, and more especially after 28 March, there was a regular epidemic of resignations and dismissals of people closely associated with his notorious rule; there were also several suicides of people from Sejna's circle, and of former employees of the courts, the Public Prosecutor's office and the Ministry of the Interior the details of which have never been properly clarified.

Thus, in an atmosphere of almost daily disclosures of murders and tortures inflicted on political prisoners in the fifties, as well as of new suicides and mutual charges of responsibility for these horrors, the darkest period in the history of this country drew to a close.

Thus it was also that Alexander Dubcek, the man who had attained the highest Party post in the wake of in-fighting among the power elite, was suddenly confronted with social revolt. Although he probably guessed how it had originated, he proved incapable of understanding either its significance or its scope.

One thing Dubcek did insist on was that a programme for the new leadership should be drafted before the settlement of cadre questions in the Party and government. With this everyone agreed, though not all for the same reason. Some hoped that the outline of an Action Programme would at least permit a realistic analysis of Czechoslovakia's political and economic situation and allow proposals for implementing and improving the reforms which the previous leaders had frustrated. Others, on the contrary, trusted that protracted work on drafting such a programme would lead to a cooling of enthusiasm and above all to

the suppression of demands for convening a special congress or conference of the Party.

The initial efforts to draft a programme were nervous and disorganized. Around 20 January Kolder summoned an *aktif* of Party specialists from various fields – secretaries, economists, historians, lawyers, sociologists. It was a strange assortment ranging from dogmatists like Fojtik to reformists like Simon and Mlynar. Sik was not even included among the economists. On the other hand, right next to Kolder in the chair, sat none other than Pavel Auersperg, the notorious former leader of the Central Committee's ideological department. There were no Slovaks at all. Kolder explained that the initial purpose of the gathering was to draw up a list of the most burning issues, 'the things', as he put it, 'which hurt us most and make people discontented'.

The meeting proceeded in a ramshackle way like some slow-motion Party happening. Everyone was given a five-page memorandum described later by one of the participants as 'a goulash of unseasoned ideas'. Kolder then invited everybody to put on paper whatever idea occurred to him; then they could help put them all together. It was a frightening spectacle to see these high Party functionaries, who for decades had orated confidently about their ideological 'armour', struggling to put life into empty phrases which had long since lost any public magic. ('Stop the excess of unfinished projects!') was one of the stirring slogans.)

Thus emerged the first version of what was amplified and amended by some hundred individual consultants (but not a single working-class representative) and commented upon by the various commissions of the Central Committee, till it emerged as the Party's 'Action Programme', discussed and approved at the April plenum.

A number of proposals were omitted from the first version, not because they had been dismissed but because it was thought unwise to publish them at the time. There was, for example, a passage discussing the possibility, or even necessity, of devaluing the crown. Recommendations for reducing defence expenditure and for eliminating the useless production ministries were omitted. Paragraphs dealing with the relation between the Party as the 'leading power' in the country, and its government, were repeatedly rewritten and left the subject no clearer than



before. The chapter on foreign relations was short and deliberately vague in parts; here, as elsewhere in the Programme, there were formulations which clearly contradicted one another.

The general reaction to the Programme was that vast effort had been expended to little avail. Young people, and especially university students, who had expected radical changes in the Party's policies, were deeply disappointed. Workers, who perhaps studied at most the passages about the economy and the proposed increases in family allowances, were chiefly anxious to see whether there was not some concealed attack on their wage packets.

To cut a long story short (there have been innumerable analyses, discussions, evaluations of the Party's ideological blueprint), Dubcek's Action Programme remained outside the mainstream of the powerful social process which had been set in motion in January. Much more was wanted than the Action Programme could ever promise. The majority of the population demanded, not democratization of a system which – to say the least – had proved inefficient, but rather an open, pluralistic society which would be both socialist and democratic, with guarantees to this effect built in. However, like all political groupings which have been clinging to power for years by using undemocratic methods and police terror, and which suddenly find themselves pressed from all sides, the Dubcek leadership reacted defensively. In numerous public declarations it 'warned' and 'rejected' the various suggested 'dangerous reform plans', and unacceptable projects, especially those concerning a limitation of the 'leading role of the Party'.\*

This was easier said than done. On the one hand, the Dubcek leadership criticized and attempted to channel pressure from

\*In this basic matter also Dubcek wavered and was indecisive. Early in March he proclaimed that the Party was not a goal in itself and that it could only aim at becoming 'a political avantgarde'; a few days later, on the contrary, he stressed that 'the leading role of the Party has to be strengthened.' Here again, Dubcek's background as a lifelong Party official and his simplistic pragmatism were apparent: he believed that in the National Front the Communist Party was 'quite naturally' the dominant element; he further believed that freedom of the press and of criticism could be an effective substitute for political opposition, in other words for an independent political movement, enjoying the same rights as the Communist Party. This theory was incidentally shattered by reformist party newspapermen and writers.

below, but at the same time it needed this very pressure, for at that point (that is, in the first few months of the Dubcek era) the hardline forces, which were still powerful, could not be defeated otherwise. There was another reason: without resolute, constant, energetic pressure and support, Dubcek and his friends would not have been able to introduce their basic reforms (for example, the abolishment of censorship, legal rehabilitation, the election of officials by secret ballot, decentralization of the mass organizations, and so on). Even less would they have been able to call a full Party congress and use it to assure their own political future.

In this situation, the kind First Secretary discovered – both on the left and on the right – plenty of goodwill, civic discipline and purity of intentions. At a Party *aktif* on 8 April, he declared:

These three months, comrades, have been ones of feverish activity by the communists and by our entire population. Many were surprised by the dynamism, by the speed of social movement after January, not to speak of the interest displayed by the population in the press, on television and on radio concerning political life and the work of our Party. . . This Party, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, is at the head of this renewal of our socialist democracy. True, certain things have got out of hand. Not because they escaped our attention but simply because too many problems have accumulated so that . . . it was beyond the strength of the Central Committee, of the Praesidium, to solve the many burning problems which are facing us today, despite the best intentions shown by the Party apparatus. . .

There have been certain fears that this sudden explosion of activity might lead to anarchy or perhaps even to some kind of counter-revolutionary attempt. I know that not everything is behind us, that we have not yet mastered all the expressions and tendencies which testify to certain anarchist leanings. . . But if we are to evaluate all that has happened in these last three months, all that has been done for the development of socialist democracy . . . we cannot be overwhelmed by such fears. For otherwise that would mean that we do not believe in the strength and the good sense of our people; it would mean that we do not believe in the political maturity of our working people and of our working-class or in the progressive movement we are witnessing today in the ranks of our youth. And I trust that this maturity is the most decisive, the strongest, the most progressive force for the Central Committee

to lean on . . . to feel the support of the progressive movement of our intelligentsia. . . Indeed, I think that we the communists do, after all, believe in people. We communists, too, are believers. We believe in the strength of the Party, of the people, in the strength and maturity of our working-class. This is the wealth on which our Central Committee can draw in its future activity.

This moving faith of Dubcek's had to be strengthened, nevertheless, by the Praesidium decision to prohibit the renovation of the Social Democratic Party and (at the end of May) by the Ministry of the Interior's announcement that the formation of political parties would be considered illegal. But once again, this was a belated and defensive half-measure, since at the same time the same Ministry gave the green light to the activity of the nucleus of a new political party, the Club of Engaged Non-Party Members (KAN), and recognized the legal statute of another big club (K-231) and tacitly registered the disintegration of the Party-sponsored youth organization (S.C.M.) by permitting an independent Club of Democratic Youth to operate. Finally, the Party itself decided to call an extraordinary congress (for 9 September in Prague) which was to be conducted in a 'new style', that is democratically, as befitted 'a movement of all progressive forces'.

Thus the second phase of the 'Czechoslovak revival' was ushered in by Novotny's fall, the proclamation of the Action Programme, another reorganization of the Praesidium (the hardliners scored by getting the reformist Boruvka dropped and by having the Stalinist Svestka elected to this still crucial body), by changes in the Secretariat (the appointment of Indra as secretary was another hardline victory) and finally by the establishment of a new government with its own programme under Cernik.

The second phase was marked by two important factors. The first was a nation-wide struggle for a broad democracy in Czechoslovakia. This was, in fact, the very heart of the Prague Spring. This hopeful season lasted eight months and made history.\*

The second decisive factor was the increasing pressure exerted

\*For documentary evidence on the pre-history and actual unfolding of events see my book *Le Printemps de Prague* (Paris, 1968: Editions du Seuil).

by Moscow and her allies in the Warsaw Pact. The development and consequences of this pressure will be the subject of the next chapter. Let us just note here that these two factors were clearly connected. Men like Brezhnev, Gomulka or Ulbricht would have gladly accepted the changes in Prague provided they had been limited to a few top Party personalities, without affecting the power structure or ideological doctrines and without aggravating polycentric tendencies in the Warsaw Pact. But the hardliners had been disappointed in all these respects, thanks to the irresistible political pressure which had built up 'from below', and the efforts of Party and non-Party intellectuals, who channelled this pressure and sometimes even invented its organizational forms.

We have seen how Alexander Dubcek came to power, almost against his will, and what a heavily discredited heritage fell to him and what he did, or did not do, in the first months after his rise to power. The basic defect of Dubcek and his friends was, of course, a hereditary malfunctioning. They were a leadership reared in Stalinist schools and accustomed to social structures which were rigid ideologically, politically and organizationally. They had little training in independent thinking, even less in independent action. They found themselves in an entirely new situation overnight, unwilling to master it by repression and, at the same time, unable to rule democratically. They appeared rather bewildered in this situation which came close to a free play of political forces.

These forces were distrusted and even feared by the good Alexander Dubcek, yet at the same time they were indispensable to his own political survival, and this was increasingly so with growing external pressures in the second part of the Prague Spring.

From the glorious celebrations of 1 May onward, the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party found itself gripped between two opposing forces as though by a pair of pliers. One force (representing the people, the nation) pushed events to conclusions considered by at least a part of the leadership as 'dangerous', 'extreme', and even 'anti-Party'. The other force (represented by Moscow) bore down all the more forcefully as the pressure of the people's opposition grew. Thus, in order to resist Soviet pressure, Dubcek's reform leadership needed the manifest support of all the people in order to negotiate with the

Soviets on anything nearing equal terms; but the more effective this support was, the more it was feared by Moscow, and the more persistently the Soviets threatened and blackmailed.

CHAPTER THREE  
SOVIET NERVES AND SOVIET TANKS

WHEN Moscow's nerve breaks, Soviet tanks usually start rolling. Proof of this rather dangerous connection was given several times during the Czechoslovak-Soviet crisis, in the form of menacing military manoeuvres and then the final invasion. A few months after Dubcek assumed power it was apparent that a crisis was in the offing. The rhythm of this crisis was dictated by the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party. And because this leadership was not (and still is not) united, and because developments in Czechoslovakia have significantly strengthened this disunity, a chart of the crisis looks a bit like the fever chart of a patient, with sharp oscillations to high temperatures followed by a sudden drop to normal.

It is difficult to say with any certainty which elements of the Prague Spring most shocked Moscow, and which, on the other hand, calmed and pacified it for a certain time at least. The task is especially difficult (as long as we do not have access to Soviet documents) because the tension in Soviet-Czechoslovak relations brought about dissension within the leadership of the Soviet Party itself. The crisis there in its turn dictated the Soviet Politburo's policy in its quarrel with Prague up to a point: hence its zig-zag and often contradictory course, and the ambiguity of Soviet moves. Nevertheless, from published and also confidential material certain priorities are evident in this policy concerning the dangers which the Prague Spring represented for Moscow and her allies.

To begin with, one important aspect of the entire crisis is worth pondering upon. In the world at large it is a common view that the danger of a Czechoslovak desertion from the socialist camp and a revision of foreign policy by the Dubcek leadership hastened the Soviet decision to occupy the country militarily. This opinion could indeed have been strengthened by a number of sharp (but basically retrospective) polemics

between Czechoslovak newspapermen and the Soviet or East German press (about responsibility for the death of Jan Masaryk, about Mikoyan's participation in the Prague judicial murders of the fifties, about the true content of 'proletarian internationalism').

In fact, the foreign political orientation of Dubcek and his friends was a secondary object of Soviet complaints. In the first phases of the crisis at least there were few doubts as to the faithfulness of the new Party leadership in Prague towards its international obligations. Even such a frankly propagandistic pamphlet as the so-called Soviet 'White Book'\* did not claim that Dubcek's Czechoslovakia intended to leave the Warsaw Pact or the Council for Mutual Economic Cooperation (COMECON), in order to proclaim neutrality, and join hands with imperialism.† It was not suggested that NATO or revanchist Germany or America were preparing for an invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak case was argued in the following way: developments *inside* Czechoslovakia, if given a free rein, would lead, indeed must lead, to Czechoslovakia leaving 'the socialist camp'. In other words: Czechoslovakia's membership in the socialist bloc of states was not threatened from the *outside* by aggressive imperialists‡ but through the offensive of the forces of reform *inside* the country; their victory and the realization of reforms in the Czechoslovak social, political and economic structures would *then* lead to attempts to revise the country's foreign policy. It was for this reason – the 'White Book' noted – that Western imperialists professed a 'great interest'

\**On events in Czechoslovakia*. Published by the Press Group of Soviet Journalists, Moscow, 1968. Czech text issued by the Czechoslovak News Agency (C.T.K.) in Prague, on 1 October 1968.

†The 'White Book' quotes in this connection only the well-known case of General Prchlik (see further), and then one 'proof': a study prepared by the Military Political Academy in Prague. In reality, however, this was an analysis of Article 11 of the Warsaw Pact which stipulates that should a treaty of collective security in Europe be signed, the Warsaw Pact would become invalid. The document went on to criticize the unfair treatment of Czechoslovakia under the treaty.

‡Such fairy tales were presented much later in the Soviet and other communist press. On the occasion of the first anniversary of the invasion, *The Times* commented appropriately (on 4 August 1969): '... the usual communist explanations of what happened – that Czechoslovakia was led astray by over-zealous reformers in league with foreign capitalists – become more irrelevant and shameful as the months go by.'

in the Czechoslovak developments and were 'keeping their fingers crossed'.

Even such a conservative, satellite regime as that of Mr Ulbricht\* did not maintain that Czechoslovakia was intending to betray the 'socialist camp'. In his first speeches, Dubcek tried hard to please the Soviet Union as regards Czechoslovakia's foreign policy slavishly repeating a number of worn-out Novotny-type slogans concerning relations between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union and Prague's faithfulness towards the Warsaw Pact. He did not even hesitate to season them with a few standard attacks against Bonn, against the Atlantic Pact and American imperialists. During his first visit to Moscow at the end of January (and in subsequent talks he had with representatives of the other friendly parties of the five Warsaw Pact countries), Dubcek apparently succeeded in persuading his counterparts that there would be no revisions or corrections of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy.

In fact, until almost the end of March, no criticism by the five Warsaw Pact countries could be found in the press. And when it appeared, it was indirect: 'heightened efforts by the imperialists' to undermine socialist regimes were pointed out, as well as the dangers of 'capitalist subversion', without Czechoslovakia being mentioned by name. Later - for example, after the publication of the Action Programme - the Soviet press quoted extensively (and therefore approvingly) from the chapter devoted to Czechoslovakia's foreign policy; while, on the other hand, it censored (that is, eliminated) those parts devoted to enlarging the

\*The first open attack against Czech reformism ('supported by Bonn') and against one of its main protagonists (Smrkovsky), came from East Berlin as late as the end of March. There were indeed a number of polemics in the East German, Polish and Soviet press, but these did not criticize the foreign policy of the Party or the government, but they attacked certain articles published in the Prague press, in which some newspapermen simply discussed the possibility of a more flexible Czechoslovak foreign policy, especially towards the German Federal Republic. Now this was nothing new: in his last year in power, Novotny himself spoke several times about 'Czechoslovakia's willingness' to normalize relations with Bonn; it was also during the Novotny era - in August 1967 - when a West German commercial mission began to work in Prague and a similar Czechoslovak mission opened offices in Frankfurt. Both missions enjoyed certain extra-territorial rights. After the fall of Dubcek, his successor Husak repeatedly stressed Czechoslovakia's desire to improve relations with the Federal Republic of Germany.



freedom of the press, and the freedom to travel abroad.\* Similarly, the Bulgarian and Rumanian press ignored paragraphs of the Action Programme dealing with the extension of individual freedoms. Otherwise, throughout this period – that is during half of the 200 days of the Dubcek era – the mass media of the five socialist countries (but also Rumania and Albania) kept eloquently silent about the nature of developments in Czechoslovakia.

The Action Programme presented by Dubcek to the Central Committee and accepted by this body on 5 April 1968, as a working blueprint for 'our socialist homeland', contained a chapter devoted to 'the international position and the foreign policy of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic'.† This chapter was the least original and most rigorously orthodox part of the Dubcek programme. It repeated the run-of-the-mill theses and slogans of Soviet foreign policy. It especially stressed that the Czechoslovak Republic intended 'to fight the forces of imperialist reaction' with the other socialist countries, to 'recognize consistently the existence of two German states and the reality that the German Democratic Republic is the first socialist state on German soil and therefore an important peace element in Europe', to 'fight neo-Nazi and revanchist tendencies' in the German Federal Republic. As far as the West was concerned, Dubcek's programme did not go beyond the often-repeated Soviet intentions: it recommended establishing contacts with 'socialists, peaceful and democratic forces in the capitalist and developing countries'; it welcomed the proposal calling a summit conference of communist parties in Moscow; and, in one single introductory sentence, it suggested that perhaps a successful realization of the Action Programme 'will make it possible for our Republic to influence international developments more actively'.‡

\*See *Pravda*, Moscow, 17 April 1968.

†Action Programme of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, special supplement of *Rude pravo* of 10 April 1968, pp. 28–9.

‡This idea was later elaborated by Smrkovsky, who said that 'the Czechoslovak road to socialism' could positively influence 'the entire international socialist movement'. He added that Czechoslovakia, in view of her position in the heart of Europe, should devote more attention to the countries of Western Europe. (*Rude pravo*, 9 February 1968). Dubcek himself expressed a similar view in a speech celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Prague coup in February 1968, in the presence of Brezhnev and heads of the other Communist Parties.

This rather timid foreign policy programme could not – and has not been – a subject for criticism by the Five; and when later some fears were expressed, they were rather as to whether Dubcek would have enough strength to follow this programme fully. In Dresden (on 23 March), at the first confrontation between representatives of the Five and Dubcek's team, Mr. Brezhnev did express an 'understandable concern' about developments in Czechoslovakia. But for all we know, this concern was aroused by developments inside Czechoslovakia and not by the foreign political orientation of the country. And if indeed Mr Brezhnev maintained (as reported in *Le Monde* on 6 May) that Dubcek was on his way to 'becoming a prisoner of reactionary and anti-communist elements', what he had in mind were 'elements' in Czechoslovakia, even in the friendly Czech Communist Party at that. When a sensational report in the East German paper *Berliner Zeitung* (on 9 May) appeared, stating that West German and American units supported by tanks were operating on Czechoslovak territory, the affair proved hilarious: several Prague papers carried reports that American soldiers and several tanks were indeed moving about in western Bohemia – film extras and armed vehicles painted grey for the production of a film showing the battle of Remagen from the Second World War!

The Warsaw Letter sent by the Five on 15 July 1968, and addressed to the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, provided clear evidence of the Warsaw Pact leaders' lack of confidence in the leadership of the Czechoslovak Party, and contained critical references to Czechoslovakia's foreign policy. But even this document stated that 'anti-socialist and revisionist forces *in the Party and in the country*' were responsible for creating a situation 'which was completely unacceptable in a socialist country. In this atmosphere attacks are also made on Czechoslovakia's foreign policy.' This meant that the 'socialist foreign policy' formulated in the Action Programme and followed consistently by Dubcek was correct but was constantly *undermined* by various 'elements'. The Warsaw Letter did not claim that Czechoslovakia had failed to fulfil its international obligations. A list of demands which the Five attached to the Letter and which were acted upon at once by the Czechoslovak Party leadership (for example, 'determined action against rightist forces' in the Party, and the prohibition of

political organization 'active against socialism', 'control of the mass media') did not include a *single* reference to Czechoslovakia's foreign policy or to its obligations towards its partners. For this reason, the Central Committee Praesidium found it easy to answer (on 17 July) this letter from the Five. Their answer simply stated :

It is well known that Czechoslovakia's foreign policy is a consistently socialist one. Its principles were formulated in the Action Programme of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and in the government programme. These documents as well as the speeches made by the Czechoslovak leadership and our other actions follow the principles of socialist internationalism, of alliance and ever deepening relations of friendship with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

It added furthermore :

Like the authors of the letter, we will never accept any threat to the historical achievements of socialism nor to the security of our country nor that imperialism should, either by peaceful or violent means, smash our socialist system, thus altering the balance of forces in Europe in its favour. The main feature of our development after January is precisely this aim to settle internal forces and confirm the stability of the socialist regime and in this way to reinforce our alliances. The general staff manoeuvres of the Warsaw Pact on Czechoslovak territory offer concrete proof of our fidelity in fulfilling our obligations to the alliance. . . The confusion and doubts manifested by public opinion in our country arise only from the repeated putting-off of the date for the departure from Czechoslovakia of the allied armies at the end of the manoeuvres.

Similarly, at Cierna nad Tisou, the last conference before the invasion (at the end of July and the beginning of August), the Soviets did not make any specific complaints about Czechoslovakia's foreign policy. On the contrary, at this conference the Czechoslovak Party stressed that it had fulfilled its foreign political obligations in order to prove its loyalty to Brezhnev and the other members of the Soviet Politburo. Whenever the negotiations ran into difficulties and the situation looked as if a split were inevitable, Dubcek and his friends always played their best card : they maintained that since January Prague's foreign policy

had not changed, nor had her faithfulness to the Warsaw Pact, COMECON, the Soviet Union and so forth, and that in this respect nothing would or could change in the future either. At Cierna, the Soviet delegation raised only once the question of the defence of Czechoslovakia's western frontiers. This problem, incidentally, had been mentioned by the Soviets from time to time in the Novotny era too, for reasons connected with their own global strategy: they had tried to find out whether Prague would be willing to negotiate a common defence of these frontiers, which would involve Warsaw Pact, and especially Soviet, units. At Cierna, the Soviet Party formulated this idea in rather foggy terms, namely 'whether within the framework of the Warsaw Pact there could not be found additional possibilities for a common defence'. The proposal was not taken up or discussed.

In a major article published in Moscow's *Pravda* on 22 August, defending in detail the necessity of the invasion of Czechoslovakia on the previous day, space was also devoted to the accusation 'that leading personalities of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic had attempted to re-evaluate some important principles in the field of foreign policy'. However, the complicated introduction did not lead on to any facts or proofs. *Pravda* accused 'certain leaders in Czechoslovakia' of having called for 'a policy of less dependence on the Soviet Union'. However, the Soviet Party did not specify who had suggested such a revision; instead, they proceeded to the conclusion that these unspecified leaders wanted 'to separate Czechoslovakia's foreign policy from that of other socialist countries'.

The only concrete evidence that *Pravda* was able to produce in this connection concerned the Czech General Prchlik. This incident is sufficiently well known to make only a brief reference necessary. Soon after the fall of Novotny, General Prchlik became head of the important (Eighth) department of the Party's Central Committee, supervising state security and army activities. On 15 July General Prchlik held a press conference in Prague, during which he noted that there was no Article in the Warsaw Pact Treaty providing for an arbitrary decision to dispatch units of member states to the territory of one of its members, without the latter's consent. Prchlik added that perhaps it was not right that the Common Pact Command should consist of officers from

only one, i.e. the biggest power, and that therefore perhaps the moment had come to make certain changes in the Treaty. It should be added here that Prchlik's comments, which could hardly be called revolutionary, were made at the time when the July manoeuvres of the Warsaw Pact armies on Czech territory had concluded, although Soviet units were not showing the slightest sign of leaving the country. As a matter of fact, this was the first military occupation of Czechoslovakia – in the form of open-ended manoeuvres which had the evident aim of exerting powerful pressure on the Dubcek leadership and the entire country. Soviet units began to clear out of Czechoslovak territory only after the conference in Cierna had concluded and after the Treaty of Bratislava had been signed on 8 August. In any case, Prchlik's comments could not be presented as the view of the Czechoslovak Party leadership or of the Czechoslovak government. On the contrary: the Czechoslovak authorities issued a public statement saying that Prchlik's views 'did not reflect actual facts and do not express an official standpoint'. Prchlik himself was returned to active military service and the Eighth department was abolished.

But perhaps the best proof that Prague's foreign policy was not the main target of Soviet criticism is provided by the text of the Moscow Protocol. The Czechoslovak Party leaders had to sign this dictate in the Soviet capital a week after the invasion, when they were at the mercy of their Soviet partners. In other words, Moscow could have squeezed almost anything out of them at that time. In spite of this, of the Protocol's fifteen articles (for full text see Appendix A), only one (10) deals with Czechoslovakia's relations with the U.S.S.R. and with Prague's foreign policy. It includes all the trivial principles proclaimed a hundred times before (and also incorporated in the Action Programme) – such as 'the struggle against imperialism', 'support for the national liberation movement', 'the strengthening of peace', and so forth. Obviously, Moscow was forcing open doors: for this had long been granted with the necessary guarantees.

If, therefore, these foreign policy requirements were so general as to be superfluous, and if they neither widened, narrowed nor changed the current orientation of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy, then only one conclusion can be drawn: Dubcek's policies concerning international relations with the socialist countries

and the Soviet Union as well as the international obligations springing from the treaties they had made, *were neither the cause of nor the reason (nor even the main pretext)* for Soviet pressure and, finally, of military intervention by the Five.

The picture is the same on the question of the 'dangers' threatening Czechoslovakia or the socialist bloc from the Atlantic Pact, the German Federal Republic or the United States. In the available documents concerning the Soviet-Czechoslovak negotiations no such accusations are to be found. We are of course leaving aside the false reports which appeared in the East German and sometimes even in the Soviet newspapers with their tales of 'hidden arms dumps' along the German-Czechoslovak border,\* the presence of West German or American units in Czechoslovakia, as well as the many but imprecise 'plots' instigated by the western imperialists etc.

No proof of these plots has ever been presented, in spite of Prague's repeated requests. During the whole Soviet-Czechoslovak crisis, the western chancelleries, NATO and the American government acted with the most extreme caution. Clearly they did not wish to furnish the shadow of a suggestion that they were influencing the crisis in any way or taking part in it. The Bonn government even changed the location of manoeuvres which were to take place in the area near the Czech border. The main preoccupation of the NATO countries in the summer of 1968 was plainly to do everything possible to prevent the occupation of Czechoslovakia – which meant doing nothing.†

\*The provocateurs had bad luck with the arms dumps which were discovered: all that was found were some worn-out arms and their location was discovered because of the obliging initiative of East German journalists!; better still, some of these weapons were in rucksacks bearing a badly erased inscription in Russian: 'large size rucksacks, top quality, GUM' (GUM is the abbreviation for a chain of Soviet department stores).

†On NATO's policy during the crisis and after the invasion, one should refer to the well-documented study of the Institute for the Study of International Organization, University of Sussex: Robert Rhodes James, *The Czechoslovak Crisis, 1968*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969 (pp. 56–91). In this study, Rhodes James says: 'Although the Russians and others grew increasingly alarmed about the situation within Czechoslovakia, neither NATO nor the Czech government gave them cause to fear that Czechoslovakia was on the point of changing sides. . . It requires emphasis that the attitude adopted by the NATO countries towards Czechoslovakia was a deliberate one, and there is no reason to doubt that the Czechoslovak leaders and their representatives urged such a policy as being the most helpful to their cause.' (pp. 79–80.)

Their policy was a scrupulous one and the only one which would not further complicate Dubcek's very difficult position and was furthermore (in the opinion of the author and many others) the only reasonable approach.\*

Furthermore it is most improbable that warnings, and even less threats, by the NATO countries would have prevented the August invasion. It is, however, likely that such attempts would have presented Moscow with the long-desired pretext for an attack, and would have strengthened the trauma of 'encirclement' to which Soviet generals have always been susceptible.

Moscow thus had no excuse for claiming that vicious attempts or preparations by the Atlantic Pact gave her no choice but to defend socialism in Czechoslovakia by force of arms. As far as the Warsaw Pact was concerned, the invasion by the Five Powers was never used to halt Prague's alleged efforts to bring about its disintegration. The bilateral treaty of 16 October 1968 concerning the provisional stationing of Soviet troops on Czechoslovak territory, does not mention the Warsaw Pact, even less any negligence by Prague of this or that clause of the Pact.†

The following conclusion was unanimously arrived at in a number of post-invasion western analyses: the Soviet Union, 'in collusion with other powers, acted as a deliberate aggressor without even the pretence of legality behind it. More, it acted against a state which had scrupulously affirmed in words and actions its loyalty to the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union

\*The Soviet journalists' 'White Book', already referred to, indirectly confirms the neutrality of the western countries, in a rather amusing way: 'In Washington, Bonn and other western capitals, the heads of governments had been trying for several months to appear totally innocent. They said: "We have got nothing to do with it. We must not be concerned with it. We must not give the slightest proof that we might have supported the 'progressives' in Czechoslovakia. There must not on any account be any concrete proof of that." This tactic was ingeniously cunning. But nowadays the world is not as credulous as you might think. It is familiar with the law governing the class struggle. (p. 4.)

†Here lies also the glaring difference between the August invasion of Czechoslovakia and the second Soviet intervention in Hungary in November 1956: Prime Minister Nagy's attempt to revoke Hungary's membership in the Warsaw Pact and to proclaim the country's neutrality, made it possible for the Soviets to claim (with some difficulty, it is true) that under Article 6 of the Warsaw Treaty the military invasion was contractually correct

throughout the months of disagreement which preceded the invasion.\*

Space has been devoted to this aspect of the Czechoslovak-Soviet crisis for several reasons. First, because there exists a certain confusion as to whether Dubcek's foreign policies played an important and perhaps crucial role when the pros and cons of invading Czechoslovakia were weighed up in Moscow. At the time of writing there are no proofs that this was so. Second, eliminating this possibility makes it easier to enumerate more precisely those events and circumstances which did in fact influence the August decision. It makes it possible even to establish certain priorities in Soviet policy decisions about Prague. Finally, it facilitates the task of establishing which elements of the crisis, whether representing real or alleged dangers, were considered by the present leadership in Moscow as *the greatest dangers to the entire system*. Dangers of such magnitude that, to eliminate them, this leadership did not hesitate to use such drastic measures as the full-scale military invasion of a friendly socialist country.

What has been said about the foreign political aspect of the crisis does not mean that there were not power-political and strategic considerations in the affair. Quite the contrary. But all of them were viewed exclusively from the point of the power-political, military, ideological, imperialist and yet also defensive interests of the Soviet super-power. These interests are considered by the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party as 'natural' and indispensable for the 'protection of socialism' in those parts of the world where communist parties are in power.† And, as we have seen, these were the very interests which Dubcek and his friends respected and which they repeatedly assured Moscow would not be violated in the future either.

Nevertheless, several incidents which occurred in the early

\*Philip Windsor and Adam Roberts, *Czechoslovakia 1968. Reform, Repression and Resistance*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1968, for the Institute for Strategic Studies, p. 31.

†This in itself is an interesting reversion to the mediaeval concepts of Natural Law, since the Russians explicitly declare that this overrides any other considerations of international law (see Windsor and Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 11). The matter becomes more complicated once there exist different and even diametrically opposed concepts of socialism or ways to defend it.



stages of the crisis did arouse the suspicions of the Soviet leadership (and above all of the Soviet generals) not so much as to the honesty and goodwill of Alexander Dubcek, but rather as to whether this new leader would have enough strength to prevent this 'dangerous slipping' into positions which the Soviets viewed as inimical, anti-Soviet, anti-socialist and, finally, counter-revolutionary. (In hardline terms, anti-Sovietism equals anti-socialism.)

During the Prague Spring certain changes were in fact carried out in the structure of the Party and state apparatus, and this restructuring immediately endangered the mechanisms of Soviet control, firmly established twenty years before and considered untouchable up till then. In this respect the purge of the security forces carried out by the Minister of the Interior, Pavel, was important. He reported to the various organs of the Party and to the government several times, expressing his surprise at the large number of Soviet agents in the Czechoslovak counter-espionage system. During the summer he started a purge, using the list of Soviet agents supplied by his services. About 150 agents of the Soviet security forces – mostly Czechoslovak citizens working for Soviet 'advisers' – were 'kicked upstairs'; that is, they continued to receive their salaries and their 'band pay' and were under one obligation only – not to do their jobs. As a result Moscow lost control over this key ministry of the country which it considered the corner stone in its alliance system.

For their part, the Soviet marshals felt uneasy at the reforms that General Dzur was carrying out in the Czechoslovak army – with the Party's approval. The Minister of Defence had relieved a certain number of Czechoslovak officers of their commands or transferred them to other posts; all of them were known to pass on information to the Soviets. During the spring of 1968 it was also decided that the superior officers of the Czechoslovak army would no longer be appointed simply by decree, but at the suggestion of the Party cell and the union of their units. This innovation tended to annul the 'numerus clausus' for the non-communists and made promotion possible for popular officers without their social origins, their membership of the Party or their 'faithfulness to the U.S.S.R.' being taken into consideration. For Moscow this was one more 'proof' that the Czechoslovak Communist Party was giving up its leading role in the country.

These purges in the Ministry of the Interior and in the army

were the subject of several alarmist reports sent by the Soviet liaison officers to the high command of the Warsaw Pact. They only served to reinforce Moscow's growing fears at the dangerous weakening of its influence in the Czechoslovak army and security forces. Later, Cernik was to say that these factors were 'the drop which made the cup brim over'.

CHAPTER FOUR  
SOCIALISM WITH A HUMAN FACE?

THROUGHOUT the Prague Spring there were countless events which first disquietened, then alarmed, and finally persuaded Moscow that its interests as a super-power were threatened by the Czechoslovak developments. But perhaps the cases mentioned already will suffice to substantiate our basic argument: that Soviet interests – and we leave aside for a moment whether this was really so – were threatened almost exclusively by developments *inside* the country.\*

In other words, precisely by that ‘human face’ which Alexander Dubcek wanted to give Czechoslovak socialism. And it is of course this human inspiration which gives Dubcek’s experiment its memorable importance.†

The law of chain reaction manifested itself. A regime which decided not to rule arbitrarily any more, but to govern with the consent of – and in cooperation with – the people was bound, first

\*Much later, in a Slovak weekly paper managed by friends of Gustav Husak, Mr Dubcek’s successor as First Secretary, the Rumanian ‘path to socialism’ was analysed. In conclusion the author noted that in foreign policy Rumania was able (and for a while allowed) to differ from the other socialist countries, but – and here was the great difference in connection with Czechoslovak events of the Dubcek era – ‘The internal reins of power remain [in Bucharest] in firm hands.’ (*Nove slovo*, No. 34, 21 August 1969.)

†Windsor and Roberts in their study maintain that it was this facet of the Prague Spring which finally proved fatal. They remarked that ever since Lenin and the Bolsheviks had seized power in 1917, they had promised to solve the colossal problems of Russia. However, the history of Soviet Communism ‘is one endless series of experiments, each marking the transition to Utopia and each a failure. Now, the government of Czechoslovakia had promised an outcome and had begun to implement it. . . It would have ensured that the nature of the state would not again be distorted or transformed in the next experiment: conducted to deal with the usual difficulties, but which a Utopian state cannot deal with unless it once more proclaims its Herculean efforts and transforms the society. To do otherwise would be to admit that here, after all, was a normal society. And that, in effect, is what Czechoslovakia was on the verge of doing. Not normal, in the sense of a state which was reverting to capitalism, or which was about to.’ (pp. 10–11.)

of all, to give the citizen a chance to say freely what he thought of those who had ruled him until now, and of the ideas in whose name they had ruled. In Czechoslovakia in 1968 this new freedom was granted primarily by the abolition of censorship. It became possible to make a kind of national inventory of twenty years of Czechoslovak Communism. The results were so disastrous that even the most courageous critics in the Party were taken aback by them. It became obvious that this rule had led to failure, often of catastrophic proportions, in every sphere of life. This analysis, brilliantly carried out by the Czech and Slovak intelligentsia, naturally gave rise to the question: *Why?* The answer was no doubt complex, but it boiled down to a simple conclusion: the source of all those errors lay in the ideological and power-political structure of the *entire system*. How could the rot be stopped, and a repetition of the blunders and crimes of the Stalin era be avoided, unless it became possible to create a realistic *alternative* system to the one that had failed?\*

Plans for the realization of alternative systems, or often simple formulations of these alternatives, were at the centre of Soviet distrust and Soviet vigilance. Indeed, the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party used all methods of pressure – political, ideological, psychological, diplomatic, economic and military – to prevent the creation of an alternative ‘model of socialism’. A series of menacing military manoeuvres was carried out under provocative conditions just to remind Dubcek and his friends where the real power lay. As early as 9 May 1968 Soviet armour advanced westward from Cracow to the Czechoslovak border. From then on manoeuvres of this sort succeeded one another. A few days before the Central Committee May Plenum opened in Prague, a number of Soviet security experts arrived in the Czech capital. Then Soviet units started arriving in western Bohemia from East German territory on the very day that the plenum began, and ten huge Antonov transport aircraft landed at Milovice airfield during the following night. No one had been informed in Prague; the first news came from provincial Party

\*At the same time this pitiless self-criticism helped reinforce the Party's position. A Slovak Marxist philosopher noted: ‘. . . the Party never commanded such spontaneous confidence and natural authority as at the time when it openly criticized itself. The negative aspects were greatly outweighed by positive ones.’ (Julius Strinka, *Listy*, No. 5, 5 December 1968.)

and administrative organizations, asking what line they should take. This was how the Ministry of Defence itself found out what was going on. Shortly after the beginning of the plenum, Czechoslovak counter-intelligence, and thereby Dubcek himself, learnt (by monitoring a conference between Soviet generals and Marshal Yakubovski) a highly important fact when the Marshal said that Soviet forces would remain in Czechoslovakia 'at least until 20 September', i.e. until the planned closing day of the Extraordinary Congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. After that 'we shall see', Yakubovski had added significantly.

Throughout the Prague Spring there were delegations on the move, travelling between Prague and Moscow – Party, government, army, Warsaw Pact, trade union and writers' delegations. And while Soviet delegations appeared uninvited, invitations to Czechoslovak delegations to come to Moscow sometimes resembled ultimatums. One such case was the overnight trip by Dubcek, Smrkovsky, Cernik and Bilak on 3–4 May, for which no adequate explanation was ever given. On 24 May, Mr Kosygin unexpectedly turned up in Prague where Marshals Grechko, Yepichev and other senior Red Army officers were already installed and the news that Kosygin was going to take the waters in Karlovy Vary was imparted to Dubcek only a few hours before his arrival; the cure was then shortened from ten to six days without explanation. What was agreed in Karlovy Vary (although never publicized) was roughly this: the Czechoslovak Communist Party would retain its monopoly of power in the country; the economic reforms would continue; Czechoslovakia's links with the Warsaw Pact and COMECON would be strengthened; staff exercises (without ground troops) would be held immediately on Czechoslovak territory; an Extraordinary Congress of the Party could be held without objections; and Novotny's Party membership could be suspended.

But all this came to nothing. In the end Moscow came to the conclusion that the reformists in Prague were either unwilling or unable to fulfil Soviet demands in a way which would be both effective and satisfactory to the Soviet leadership. The decision was taken to destroy the Czechoslovak experiment by a military operation.

There was a certain logic in the unfolding of events. The

nationwide discussion in Czechoslovakia on the reasons for and the consequences of the bankruptcy of the Novotny regime could not but involve the Soviet system as well. After all, for twenty years communism in Czechoslovakia had been built (as proudly proclaimed) on the pattern of the Soviet Union. The failure of one could not but throw discredit on the other. Even more important, the mistakes and failures of the Novotny regime were connected with, or caused by, the Soviet system, Soviet policy, Soviet directives and treaties. This connection was only too obvious, whether it concerned the economy or ideology, culture or agriculture, the organization of industry or the organization of youth. Who was footing the bill was also clear: the Czechoslovak people, and sometimes to the profit of the greater power.

The lesson was simple: 'a new model of socialism', the realization of Dubcek's final vision of a more just, more open system, was in the final analysis unthinkable, without revising relations with the Soviet Union. In this respect the apprehension of the Soviet Politburo and the Soviet generals was justified. Moreover, if such a revision was necessary and even feasible in the relations between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union in favour of the smaller and infinitely weaker country – then why not also between the Soviet Union and Hungary or Poland or perhaps even the Ukraine? Moreover, revisions are often open-ended: how far would this one go? Right to the separation of Czechoslovakia from the 'socialist commonwealth', and to the latter's disintegration?

The struggle waged by the leadership of the Soviet Party against the fraternal Czechoslovak Party up to the August invasion should be seen in this overall perspective. It then becomes possible to understand more fully all the appeals, warnings, demands and directives addressed by Moscow to Dubcek and his team.

Let us take the most frequent Soviet reminder as an example: the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, it claimed, was losing its 'leading role' (meaning absolute power) in the country. Needless to say, Moscow did not insist with such vehemence simply to remind a fraternal party that they were neglecting a basic Leninist principle. Nor was it a reminder that once communists have gained power in a country, this power must not be

shared with anybody. What Moscow really demanded was that all this indivisible power remained in the hands of a Communist Party which completely accepted 'recommendations' from one particular centre of international communism, including all ideas . . . reformist or otherwise. Consequently, Dubcek's and his Party's assurances (in their answer to the Warsaw Letter of the Five) were in vain when they protested that far from being weakened, the Party had been strengthened after Novotny's fall, that there was a 'growth of the authority of the new democratic policy of the Party in the eyes of the broad working masses', that the new leadership would be able 'to lead and direct politically in a different way from the discarded bureaucratic methods of the past . . .': this was exactly what the Soviets and their allies did not want and what they feared most. This was an 'impossible heresy'.

It was a heresy which had its root in the Party, and was therefore all the more dangerous.\* In the Soviet 'White Book' there are hundreds of quotations from statements by Czech and Slovak Communists purporting to prove that 'the enemy had penetrated the Party.'

Some of Dubcek's critics were even more specific, and stated that during the Prague Spring

the leading role of the Party was weakened to the point of the actual liquidation of its role [*sic*]. Step by step, all important parts of the machinery of the state were disrupted or neutralized on purpose, together with the most important element of the political system, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The latter was torn apart by internal strife and become almost helpless.†

\*It is . . . in the nature of the rule of the totalitarian despot that he cannot tolerate any rival institution. . . But a party, however monopolistic, with a corporate life, and institutional order and a living ideology of its own, can be just as much a threat to the rule of the despot as a free parliament; he must therefore destroy it before it seeks to destroy him. . . The source of authority of every party official (in the Soviet Union) was not in his office: it was the fact that his continuing to occupy the office (when everyone knew he could disappear at any moment) was a public mark of the leaders' favour.' Leonard Schapiro, 'Reflections on the Changing Role of the Party in a Totalitarian Polity', *Studies in Comparative Communism*, University of Southern California, Vol. 2, No. 2, April 1969, pp. 4-7.

†Jiri Smrcina in *Rude pravo*, 8 July 1969.

Dubcek's successor Gustav Husak declared at the May 1969 Central Committee plenum :

All kinds of opportunist tendencies made themselves apparent in the Party. . . Under the banner of a new model of socialism the basic principles concerning the structure of the Party, its leading position in society, were rejected. . .

The duty – some Soviet documents even speak of 'sacred duty' – of a Party thus threatened is, above all, to return to government by arbitrary means ('democratic centralism'), that is to the methods which were the central target of the critical storm of the Prague Spring. The Warsaw Letter of the Five spoke clearly in this respect :

We were convinced that you would guard as the apple of your eye the Leninist principle of democratic centralism. To ignore any facet of this principle . . . leads irresistibly towards a weakening of the Party and its leading role to a transformation of the Party into a bureaucratic organization or a discussion club.\*

This 'Leninist principle' was properly formulated in the Moscow Protocol of 26 August 1968. The Czechoslovak Party leadership, brought to the Soviet capital by force, was directed (in paragraph 3) 'to dismiss from their posts those people whose activities would no longer serve to strengthen the leading role of the working class and the Communist Party'. This amounted to a purge of the reformists and the liquidation of everything they stood for and had wanted to achieve. After Dubcek's fall, this aim was fully realized.

In short, Moscow and her allies in the Warsaw Pact did not fear a disintegration of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the consequent loss of decisive power in the country, so much as a powerful and proud Communist Party that would remain in power in a key country of Central Europe, a Party which would be at least partially *independent* of Moscow, and which would

\*A deputy editor-in-chief of the Polish paper *Zycie Warszawy*, Mr Wojny, admitted at a press conference in Zurich that the final decision to intervene in Czechoslovakia by force was made mainly because 'the position of the leading force in the country, the Communist Party . . . had been steadily weakening', and from the point of view of 'international socialist interests' things had 'got out of hand'. (See *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 19 July 1969.)



be democratically constituted and politically attractive even to non-communists. They feared that this power, and this respectability, would be considerably strengthened by the process of democratization and independence.

In this respect, the case of the Fourteenth Extraordinary Congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party was a good example. The decision to hold this Congress was made at a plenary session of the Central Committee at the end of May, when the Prague Spring was in full bloom. It was a political decision of the first order. The structure of the Central Committee presented a potential but constant danger to Dubcek and his supporters. It consisted predominantly of conservative and foot-dragging *aparatchiks* who did not want to rock the boat, but also of unreliable opportunists. Indeed, ever since January this majority was successful in postponing any serious discussion about the convocation of a Congress. Finally, at the May plenum, the reformists prevailed and the opening of the Congress was set for the 9 September.\*

The Central Committee is considered the highest Party organization in the period between Congresses and its composition can be changed only by the Congress. The one which was to open on 9 September was to have been attended by delegates elected by regular ballot (at district and regional Party conferences) and recruited almost exclusively from reformist circles. Consequently, the results of the Congress could not be doubted: all the hardline Novotny-type members of the Central Committee would be eliminated. From that moment on, Dubcek's hands would really be freed, especially since domestic quislings and Soviet agents were recruited exclusively from the conservative members of the Central Committee. Thus, their elimination would have meant a substantial weakening of Soviet influence in the top Party and state organizations. Once these changes had been made and approved by Congress, a point of

\*In a long article entitled 'The Strategic Premises of January and their Deformations', a dogmatic Czech journalist (Jiri Hajek) noted that the 'healthy forces' in the Central Committee hoped to succeed again at the May plenum in rejecting any idea of calling the Congress. However, it proved that this was 'not a well-founded confidence' and the conservatives in their majority voted for the convocation. Hajek maintained that this was a major mistake which influenced the course of all future developments. (*Nova Mysl*, No. 7, July 1969.)

no return could have been reached: the pro-Soviet 'healthy forces' would have been rendered powerless.

Once the decision to convoke the Extraordinary Congress was made, the Soviets had at all costs to prevent its actually taking place. Some observers are of the opinion that the date of 9 September was a decisive one in Moscow's plans. After the invasion, *Pravda* commented (on 22 August):

. . . the rightist forces used the preparations for the Congress to strike a blow at the healthy forces of the Party, to place their people in the district and regional organizations of the Party, and to impose their policies on the Party.

Absurdities abounded throughout the Czechoslovak crisis and one was that the invasion did not in fact forestall the calling of the Extraordinary Congress, but precipitated it. It opened in Prague on the second day of the country's occupation (22 August). True, it met under the conditions of an underground meeting, but this made it all the more memorable.\* Its results were no less memorable even if they were arbitrarily annulled by Soviet power a week later. Altogether, 1,192 delegates out of a total of 1,545, all properly elected, attended. Among the resolutions passed there was one which stated that the intervention of foreign troops had violated 'the sovereignty of a free, socialist state'. The resolution requested the immediate retreat of troops and the renewal of all civic freedoms and rights. A new Central Committee was elected: among the 144 members not *one* could be considered a Stalinist or rigid hardliner (although there were a number of centrists).†

It may be added that this 'revolutionary' Central Committee was the first in the post-war history of the Party to be democratically elected, and properly constituted. It enjoyed the trust of Party members and at least the respect of others. Consequently, the highest organ of a communist party had never before had a better moral or real claim to become a first-rate political force in the country. If Moscow's passionate concern for the 'leading role of the Party' had been the least honest one, then

\*The Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, in turn, officially declared the Congress illegal at its September 1969 session.

†For detailed history see Jiri Pelikan, *Panzer überrollen den Parteitag*, Europa Verlag, Vienna, 1969.

here was a Central Committee based on fair procedures. But as we have seen, Moscow was only interested in the 'leading role' of her own lackeys. One of the main demands in the Moscow Protocol was the annulment of the Fourteenth Extraordinary Congress.\*

A similar ambiguity can be discerned in the Soviet stand on the question of the Czechoslovak mass media – the performance of the press, radio and television during the Prague Spring and the week of occupation of 21–28 August. There hardly exists any Soviet document, statement, article or minutes taken at any bilateral or multilateral conference concerning the Czechoslovak developments in 1968, which does not violently criticize the mass media. It has been said that thousands of planes and armoured cars together with an army of half-a-million men were dispatched one night in order to find and kill – words. This may be an exaggeration. But even if Soviet arms were directed to kill the dangerous Czech virus which spread in the form of the written and spoken word, the fantastic operation must still be seen in terms of political realities.

As early as the Dresden conference of March 1968, the representatives of the Five concluded (with Dubcek present) that 'a situation of disintegration, wavering and uncertainty has been developing in Czechoslovakia'. It was later claimed that at this meeting even 'the Czechoslovak comrades could not deny . . . that radio, television and the press had eluded the Party's control and were to all practical purposes in the hands of anti-socialist elements . . .' (quoted in *Pravda*, 22 August 1968). There are doubts whether Dubcek and those with him in Dresden spoke in this manner. The Warsaw Letter of the Five was more precise:

The forces opposed to socialism, together with the revisionist forces, have got control of the press, radio and television in your country. They have used them to undermine the friendly relations between Czechoslovakia and the other socialist countries. . . The cause of working-class power, the defence of the achievements of socialism in Czechoslovakia requires . . . that all the information

\*In the Moscow negotiations which preceded the signing of the Protocol, Gustav Husak played a miserable role. He supported the Soviet view of the 'illegality' of the Congress under the pretext that Slovak delegates did not attend. In actual fact, some delegates did attend, but the majority were unable to get to Prague due to the invasion of the country.

media – press, radio and television – be used in the interest of the workers and of socialism.

It would be necessary to compile a vocabulary of Soviet euphemisms in order to give the true meaning of such notions as 'revisionist forces', 'friendly relations', 'moral terror', 'the power of the working class', so frequently used and misused by Soviet statesmen and spokesmen. Several volumes would be required to decipher the Soviet 'White Book'. A good half of this 'document' consists of quotations from the Czechoslovak press, radio and television in the period of the Prague Spring. Its aim is to prove that censorship in Czechoslovakia had ceased to function – an unheard-of event – and that the Party had lost control of the mass media to the point where it verged on treachery. The conclusion drawn by Soviet newspapermen is simple: the Czechoslovak information media once freed from the shackles of censorship 'became the tools of counter-revolution, tools in the hands of those who were striving for a violent restoration of the capitalist order in Czechoslovakia'.\* The Moscow Protocol simply ordered Prague:

To take rapidly a series of measures which would reinforce socialism and the workers' government; the first priority being to establish control over the information media so that they will fully serve the cause of socialism. To this end all manifestations of anti-socialism on the radio and television must cease. . . The Party and state organs will watch over this purge of the press, radio and television and promote it by new laws and statutes. . . A re-allotment of the leading posts of the press, radio and television is inevitable.

Few international agreements can be found in which censorship is demanded in such a blatant manner and with such specific insistence. These measures were not only dictated to prevent criticism of the victorious power; but were intended above all to secure praise and the propagation of those ideological recipes in the name of which the country was attacked and forced to its knees.

\*All leading editors in the Czechoslovak information media were communists, many of them Party members of long standing, several among them members and candidate members of the Central Committee.

Yet, once again, it would be erroneous to believe that the Soviet comrades were criticizing the mass media in Czechoslovakia for disseminating 'right-wing opportunist deviations' such as a 'classless concept of freedom'. The real trouble was that the nationwide discussion initiated by the press, and especially by the radio and television, developed into a terrible weapon which then dealt deadly blows at a lot of ideological nonsense, at repeated lies, breaching the information black-out and intellectual isolation – all of which are indispensable to the present-day Soviet system. Moscow was convinced that without this ideological and power apparatus of restrictions, a Czechoslovak 'socialist' system could not exist.\*

After the Soviet demand to 'control' the information media came requests for the immediate suspension of organizations which had been formed during the Prague Spring and had begun to develop their activities outside the framework of the Party and the National Front.† Soviet displeasure was especially provoked by organizations or groups which were political in nature or aimed at political activity: the Club of Committed Non-Party Members (KAN), several groups of students and young people (intending to stand in the next elections as independent deputies), and – most important – a group of former officials of the Social Democratic Party who began to explore

\*In the previously quoted article, which attempted to evaluate from a dogmatic point of view the gravest mistakes supposedly committed by the dogmatists during the Prague Spring, the following conclusion was arrived at: 'In the conditions of modern civilization, under-estimation of the role of the mass media as one of the most important means of exerting power is to be considered fatal for the policy of the Party. . . By June 1968, the Party had become a prisoner of the media. . .' (Jiri Hajek, 'Strategic Premises . . .' pp. 786 and 788.)

†The National Front was formed immediately after the war as a political grouping of the two Communist Parties (Czech and Slovak), and several other political parties authorized to operate (the Social Democratic, the Socialist, Christian Socialist, etc.). After the 'Prague coup' of 1948, the Social Democratic Party had been joined to the Communist Party (due to an arbitrary decision by fellow travellers among the Social Democrats); the other non-Communist Parties have become insignificant satellites of the 'leading political force' in the country. Prior to the Dubcek era, political activity (if any) was allowed only within the National Front. This was to be changed by a constitutional law, scheduled to be approved by the National Assembly in September 1968, as part of Dubcek's reforms. After the invasion the idea was dropped.

the possibility of renewing their activities as an independent Party.

These efforts, all still in the initial stages, seemed highly suspicious to Moscow. The 'leading role of the Party', or in plain language the power of a friendly elite group, might be at stake. The issues were fairly clear: the origins of the Prague Spring were to be found in the practically general desire of the Czechs and Slovaks, communists and non-communists alike, to change the prevailing system of uncontrolled power concentrated in the hands of a small group of mediocre people. Effective guarantees, written into the constitution, were requested by way of assurance that such a concentration of power could not re-occur. In this connection a certain plurality of political life seemed desirable. But even the boldest ideas on this matter took specific Czechoslovak conditions and foreign policy limitations into account. What the reformists basically wanted to achieve was the gradual formation of interest and pressure groups which would be allowed to influence the elected bodies within the overall framework of a *socialist society*. Such ideas were an unacceptable proposition to Brezhnev or Ulbricht (but also to more liberal Marxist-Leninists). Moreover, for twenty years Czechoslovakia had been a stable satellite which the Soviet Union of Stalin or Brezhnev could have felt certain, and proud of. But it was precisely this slavish dependence which had led the country into economic, political and moral crisis; furthermore, this type of dependence could not continue and would sooner or later have led to a clash with the spirit of the Prague Spring if not with Dubcek's reform programme. This produced yet another vicious circle: a rational alliance freely entered into, which was understood and supported by the people, was unacceptable, perhaps even incomprehensible, in Moscow given the social and ideological structure of Soviet society and the restrictive, reactionary framework in which this society has to live under hardliners of the Brezhnev type.

This vicious circle becomes even more apparent if we consider the following enigma: if Dubcek and his friends had at least been allowed to put the reforms outlined in the Action Programme into practice, to institute legal and political rehabilitation of the victims of judicial errors in the fifties, to maintain freedom of the press, to give Sik a chance to pursue his

economic reforms – in short, to put full trust in the people, there is little doubt that the people would have appreciated this. This would have meant that Dubcek's Communist Party, even in fairly free political competition, would have had good, perhaps excellent, chances to remain if not the 'leading force' then the most influential and best organized political movement in the country. Moscow pushed Dubcek in exactly the opposite direction; it denounced the Prague Spring as anti-socialist and counter-revolutionary. Because of this the reformists in the Party had to be very cautious, and sometimes even had to postpone important items in their programme. In doing so, they necessarily lost the people's trust in the real aims of their reforms (doubts were only too legitimate in view of the past). The net result was that a growing number of people, Party members included, argued that a dominant Communist Party would be a danger in itself; in these circumstances (as is always the case with hesitant, dribbling political movements) Dubcek's Party might indeed have come out of free elections weakened or in a minority. This would amount to the very weakening of the communists' power Moscow feared, but to which, by its policies, it actually contributed.

Throughout the Czechoslovak crisis, the five communist powers made it clear that their warnings were in deadly earnest: 'either the "healthy elements" in the Czechoslovak Party retain the monopoly of power in the country or we shall come to help you secure it'. As early as mid-July 1968, this was clearly stated in the following part of the Warsaw Letter:

Recently, the clubs and political organizations formed outside the National Front have in fact become the headquarters of the reactionary forces. The Social Democrats are obviously trying to reform their party. They are organizing secret committees and want to take leadership of the country in order to restore the bourgeois system. . . The cause of working-class power [that is, a Communist Party directed centrally, according to the concept of the 'pyramid of power'. Author's note], the need to defend socialism's achievements in Czechoslovakia, calls for a resolute and courageous onslaught on the anti-socialist forces of the right, in order to mobilize all the means of defence at the disposal of the socialist state and to put an end to the activities of all political organizations which are making a stand against socialism.

The 'White Book' tries to prove that even after the Cierna conference, clubs such as KAN, K-231 and the Social Democrats (the latter, of course, in connection with the Socialist International) aimed at an 'organizational consolidation of power' in the country (p. 42). Elsewhere (on p. 48) the reader is informed that

an emissary of the 'Socialist International', a certain Krivine, arrived in Prague. He was given the task of supporting the subversive activity of counter-revolutionary elements. At a meeting of Prague students in the Slavonic House, Krivine persuaded unstable young people to commit actions against the people's socialist acquisitions. Krivine furthermore gave the students a leaflet containing a letter by Modzelewski and Kuron who were arrested in Poland for anti-state activity. He further noted down addresses to which counter-revolutionary literature was to be mailed from abroad.

*Pravda* of 22 August stated that 'an opposition has been born in Czechoslovakia.' Whereas this opposition had claimed the same rights to power as the Communist Party, at the beginning of the Prague Spring, 'by June nobody attempted to hide the fact that something else was afoot: the elimination of the Communist Party from power and the establishment of a new non-communist leadership in the country.'

From these and similar arguments in which the various admonitions of the Five throughout the Czechoslovak crisis abounded, it is quite clear that the Soviets attached great importance to the possibility that a political organization (especially if it were Marxist-orientated and socialist) might be found which would eventually be able (alongside the Czechoslovak Communist Party) to take part in the country's political life, no matter how limited its influence might be. It is for this reason that the 4th Article of Moscow Protocol stipulated:

One must not allow organizations to exist which take up clearly anti-socialist stands. Nor must a renewal of the anti-Marxist Social Democratic Party be permitted to take place.

Was Moscow really so afraid of these dreaded 'anti-socialist' forces, or was it merely a pretence? Did the Soviets really believe



that Dubcek's position had been undermined or was it rather that they wanted to destroy his experiment of 'socialism with a human face'? While a final answer will not be possible till more proof is available, the second alternative seems by far the more probable. In present-day Soviet diplomacy there are perhaps more irrational and contradictory elements than in the era when Stalin ruled alone with an iron fist. This collective collegial rule, and the methods by which decisions are arrived at, have become extremely difficult to understand or to decipher. In addition, Soviet policy often does not seem to take into account analyses based on facts and other concrete data which influence and direct most governments in their major policy decisions.

There is yet another influential factor which some observers call the 'Russian mentality', and which a Czech Communist termed the 'fourth, Asiatic, dimension', or, as a commentator of Radio Prague (on 26 August 1968) put it more bluntly 'oriental ruse, intrigue and double-talk, without apparent limit'. In the Soviet-Czechoslovak crisis of 1968, human factors seem to have played an important role. The decision to invade a fraternal socialist country, naturally involving serious consequences, was taken by a 'collective leadership' (as the Soviet Politburo likes to call itself), a cautious, unimaginative and highly pragmatic body. The Czechoslovak crisis shook the Soviet leadership to its roots. All these elements played their part so that the final decision to eliminate the Czechoslovak heresy took the form of a number of *ad hoc* measures, which were at times energetic, at other times ambiguous, and on the whole reminiscent of horse-trading: that is, to get the best possible price, to haggle, to bargain, to pretend that negotiations have collapsed only to reopen them the next day, to scream and smile alternately. . .

Three weeks before the invasion, bilateral talks at the highest level took place between the Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party and the Praesidium of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. The location of the talks was Cierna nad Tisou, in the eastern tip of Slovakia, near the Soviet border. These negotiations ended with an agreement and a one-day summit meeting of the leaders of the five Communist Parties and their Czechoslovak counterparts in Bratislava. At these two conferences confidential minutes were taken by

some of the Czech participants. They give valuable insight into the more or less irrational behaviour of top Soviet politicians in a tight corner. For this reason we shall give these minutes more detailed attention.

CHAPTER FIVE  
AT CIERNA AND BRATISLAVA

By the second half of July it was clear both in Prague and Moscow that there would have to be direct negotiations between the two countries. Czechoslovakia insisted that they should be bilateral only, and that they should be held on her own territory. Moscow deliberately left Prague in uncertainty, and up to the last moment the Czechoslovak side did not know when talks would actually take place. Nevertheless, the careful preparation of all relevant material continued in Prague. Dubcek and his friends had no great illusions. They accepted the possibility that they might fail to move the Soviets and that points of view on both sides would remain pretty much as they were. The Czechoslovak delegates drew up three fundamental points which both the Praesidium and the whole Central Committee approved, on which they would remain adamant :

1. Nothing had changed or would change in Czechoslovakia's foreign policy, her adherence to the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet alliance, COMECON, etc.
2. The Warsaw Letter of 18 July should be annulled; mutual attacks and polemics in the press, radio and television of the socialist countries should be stopped and any future debates would be conducted between Party or state delegations.
3. Czechoslovak forces would be acknowledged as adequate for the defence of the western frontier.

These points were agreed on at the preliminary consultation at Cierna, where the Czechoslovak delegates arrived on Sunday evening, 28 July. The delegation considered its position rather strong in view of the nation-wide signature campaign of the previous days,\* but it wanted to avoid the sterile and protracted ideological debates at which Soviet communists are so adept. The Cierna talks were scheduled to last a day or at the most one-

\*More than a million Czechoslovak citizens had signed the petition in support of Dubcek.

and-a-half days: Tito was due to arrive in Prague on 31 July, and Ceaucescu two days later.

The Soviet delegates arrived in Cierna at 9.52 a.m. on the morning of Monday 29 July in a special armoured train with bullet-proof glass and its own radio link. Although Moscow had insisted on the entire praesidial body of both Parties' Central Committees attending, two Soviet members in fact stayed behind: Kirilenko, a hardliner, and Polyansky, a reputed moderate. There were extensive security precautions, especially round the actual site of the talks which was the railwaymen's clubhouse some 150 or 200 yards from the station. The Soviet guards had hand-grenades in their pockets and about one division of Soviet troops was deployed in the district of Chop, four or five kilometres from the frontier, on Soviet territory.

Brezhnev reproached Dubcek from the start for the Czech failure to keep the venue a secret, contrary to the previous understanding. Dubcek admitted this, while suggesting that the Soviets had also been guilty of various indiscretions.

The Soviet tactic was to attack, and Brezhnev's opening offensive was a four-hour monologue, consisting of a stream of quotations from Czechoslovak newspapers, radio and television reports, mingled with demagogic denunciations of such 'counter-revolutionaries' as Cisar, Sik, Goldstücker, Svitak, Selucky and Kohout, ill-drawn conclusions and demands basically the same as those in the Warsaw Letter. This tirade reduced the temperature of relations between the two sides to zero and they lunched separately. As the Soviets had intended, the Czechoslovaks felt they had been forced on to the defensive. Dubcek's answer that afternoon was nevertheless felt to have been skilful, moderate and at the same time firm, particularly with regard to the Party's post-January course.

The position of the two sides was diametrically opposed and at times the negotiations resembled a dialogue of the deaf. When the day's session ended at 10.30 p.m. the discussions appeared to be heading for a complete breakdown. The Russians pulled back the 300 yards on to Soviet territory in their special train. The Czechoslovak delegation felt gloomy and isolated, knowing that even its own confidential telephone line to Prague was being tapped by the Russians. Unable to sleep, Dubcek spent the night chatting with the local railwaymen till 3.30 in the morning.

Before talks were resumed on 30 July the Czechoslovaks learnt that a letter had appeared in *Pravda*, purportedly from ninety-nine employees of the Auto-Praga factory, voicing sharp criticism of the Party leadership. The first speaker that day was General Svoboda, who stood firm on the previous day's Czechoslovak arguments and rejected the Russian ones as spurious. He particularly stressed the issue of national sovereignty and indicated that he would not continue as President if Czechoslovakia's independence was not fully respected.

Svoboda's adamant stand was an embarrassment to the Soviet delegates, who had assumed that he of all the Czechs would have been most willing to compromise. (They based this supposition on Svoboda's wartime activity in command of Czechoslovak troops in Russia, and on such incidents as Khrushchev's inquiry after him when he visited Prague for the Eleventh Congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in 1958; the Russian leader's interest had secured Svoboda's return from the humble post to which the former Defence Minister and Lenin prize winner had been relegated when he fell from favour in the early fifties.) The Russians hoped that Svoboda, then, would line up with those hardline members of the Czechoslovak Praesidium whose presence at Cierna they had ensured. After he had spoken, however, an excited and confused atmosphere reigned with members of the two teams, as they sat on opposite sides of the long table with the candidate members of the respective Praesidiums at the ends, talking out of turn and interrupting one another. There was even an outburst of anti-Semitic venom against one of the Czechoslovak delegates, Frantisek Kriegel,\* who mildly inquired why he was objectionable and got a loud retort from the Ukrainian Shelest: 'You just *are* – we don't have to explain why!' Dubcek took Kriegel's part, banging on the table with his fist and shouting in Russian: 'You're not going to treat *us* as underlings, comrades!' 'You'll get used to it, Alexander,' Svoboda put in. 'Marshal Koniev treated me as an underling all through the war.'

When the two delegations separated for lunch there was gloomy discussion on both sides as to the next step. The Czechoslovaks were ready to go back to Prague for a number of reasons.

\*Kosygin: 'Who is this Kriegel? Is he a Czech at all? Is he not a Galician Jew?'

But at that moment four junior members of the Soviet delegation came to their train and urged the importance of continuing talks and reaching agreement. It was clear that the Russians did not want Cierna to end as a fiasco. So Dubcek had to ask for a postponement of Tito's visit to Prague – which also suited Brezhnev well.

The afternoon's session was quieter but rather inconsequential. The Soviet side again raised the questions of censorship; personal changes in the Czechoslovak Party, the security forces and the army; and the underestimation of 'anti-socialist forces' by the new Party leaders in Prague. Everything else could be regarded as Czechoslovakia's own domestic business, the Soviets now declared.

Meanwhile, in Prague an uneasy feeling spread. Central Committee Secretary Cisar, put in charge of Party affairs in the absence of the Praesidium, had no news from Cierna. On Tuesday evening, when it was clear that negotiations were not yet concluded and so could not have been smooth, discussion of various alternative procedures began. One suggestion was a meeting with Kadar and an attempt at unilateral annulment of the Warsaw Letter. Finally it was decided to send a MIG with another Central Committee Secretary, Sadovsky, on board; he was to find his way to the Czechoslovak delegates, appraise himself of the situation and return to Prague on Wednesday morning. Fortified with vodka, Sadovsky fulfilled this mission and brought back the credible report that the talks looked like breaking down. The atmosphere in the capital was hardly improved by reports from the Ministry of the Interior that an unprecedented number of Soviet tourists – almost all men, and all wearing boots of the same type – were streaming in; the Minister of the Interior, Pavel, ordered them to be followed. Movements of tanks, military cars and aircraft were being noted by observers in Cinovec on the East German frontier. An unconfirmed rumour came from Slovakia that General Kodaj was treating with Soviet officers there. The Prague City Committee of the Communist Party proposed the immediate convocation of a congress.

When the next day the Soviet train backed into Cierna station, all the members of the Soviet delegation emerged from it except Brezhnev. While the rest moved off to the conference room,

Dubcek got into the Soviet train alone to speak to Brezhnev, who was said to be indisposed. The Russian certainly had reason to be ill at ease, for even those members of the Czechoslovak team he had most relied on, Kolder and Bilak, had identified themselves with the views of their colleagues. Both, however, qualified their statements by saying that 'on certain points they agreed with the criticism expressed in the Warsaw Letter.'

The differences of opinion which really did exist in the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Party and were reflected in the Czechoslovak delegation to Cierna, were known to the Soviets. On 22 August 1969 *Pravda* mentioned them directly: 'In the negotiations at Cierna nad Tisou the division of opinion in the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Party's Central Committee was evident. A minority of Praesidium members, headed by Alexander Dubcek, took an overtly rightist-opportunist line, whilst the majority adopted an attitude which took into account the need for an energetic struggle against the reactionary anti-socialist forces, and against any kind of indulgence towards the reaction.' The details of this account are glaringly incorrect. Even if Kolder or Bilak agreed to a point here or there, without the agreement of the 'heroes of the Prague Spring', Svoboda, Smrkovsky and Dubcek, their advice was completely invalid from a political point of view: the nation had no confidence whatsoever in them; they knew this themselves and so did the Soviets. If the Politburo were unable to put this lack of unity in the Czechoslovak delegation to better use, it is because it only reflected their own lack of unity.

During the lunch interval the various representatives took a stroll through the village. Tito's visit to Prague, already deferred to Thursday, was postponed again by telephone. Then talks were resumed between two teams of four: Brezhnev (now fully recovered), Podgorny, Kosygin and Suslov on the Soviet side: Dubcek, Cernik, Smrkovsky and Svoboda for Czechoslovakia. In this smaller forum the atmosphere changed considerably in favour of the Czechoslovaks; the Russians seemed keen to reach agreement and the Warsaw Letter was forgotten. The greatest surprise of all was a moderate and appeasing statement by Suslov, who went so far as to call the Czechoslovak January policy a renaissance of Marxism in a certain sense, and to agree that 'the Czechoslovak question must be settled by agree-

ment if great harm is not to ensue for the international communist movement and its unity'.

Some reasons for the Soviet change of mood lay outside Cierna. On 30 July two members of the Spanish Communist Party had flown to Moscow, asked for an immediate audience with Kirilenko and handed him a letter from eighteen European communist parties demanding the cessation of Soviet interference in the domestic affairs of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Otherwise the signatories threatened to convene a meeting to examine and possibly condemn the behaviour of the Five. At the same time warning letters also arrived in Moscow from Tito and Ceaucescu – Tito's moderate and factual, Ceaucescu's indignant and, in Soviet eyes, insulting.

These factors no doubt influenced the Soviet delegates at Cierna. Brezhnev, Kosygin and in particular Suslov adopted a conciliatory tone, especially when the Czechoslovak team renewed its assurance of loyalty to all obligations ensuing from membership in the Warsaw Pact and COMECON. They also gave verbal undertakings at the four-plus-four meeting that 'anti-socialist tendencies' would not be allowed to spread in Czechoslovakia, that the Social Democratic Party would not be revived and that the activities of clubs like the KAN and the K-231 would be held in check. For their part the Soviets agreed that both the Warsaw Letter, and the Czechoslovak reply to it, would be 'forgotten'. There was even talk of a Soviet loan; Brezhnev hinted that it would be easy to arrange, though most of it would be in roubles and grain rather than in gold or hard currency.

There remained the drafting of a final communiqué. Great difficulties arose over this. The preliminary versions sketched out by the two sides were diametrically different from one another. The Czechoslovak one ran to four pages and included explanations of various features of the reform programme which were important to Prague and with which the Russians had expressed agreement. The Soviet side had prepared a vague, rhetorical text, not unlike the one issued from Bratislava three days later. Discussion of the drafts was long and inconclusive; the talks had to be extended yet another day and Tito's visit called off once more. Evidently the Soviets were willing to wait provided they obtained a written agreement. They continually returned to their bugbear: that the Czechoslovak press, radio and television



were spreading reports 'both incorrect and outside Party control'.

Finally, on Wednesday evening, it was agreed that there would be an immediate end to the polemics conducted by the mass media both of Czechoslovakia and of the five Warsaw Pact countries. This was the only way, the Soviet delegates said, of ensuring that the Czechoslovak Communist Party could prepare for the Extraordinary Congress calmly, scheduled now (with the Russians' approval) for 9 September.

At 11 p.m. that night Cernik telephoned Cisar to try to ensure that the Czechoslovak mass media would comply with this agreement. Since censorship had been abolished, this was easier said than done: the leading weeklies were already out, and *Literarni listy* carried among other things an unflattering caricature of Ulbricht. Central Committee Secretary Mlynar frantically proposed the confiscation both of this periodical and of *Reporter*; Pavel, the Minister of the Interior, refused to give any such instructions to the police and threatened to resign if anyone else gave them. Another call was made to Cernik, who decided to let things take their own course.

Brezhnev started off on the fourth day with complaints about caricatures in the Czechoslovak press as evidence that the Party 'does not have a firm grip on things'; fortunately the Czechoslovak delegation was able to quote in return the East German press of that day, which carried a condemnation of the Czechoslovak Party line by the American C.P. Despite this the Russians were in a conciliatory mood, particularly Brezhnev himself, who had a 'new plan'! In view of the difficulties which had arisen over the drafting of the communiqué, and particularly because questions had been touched upon which had been the subject of discussion by the Five at Warsaw, a fresh consultation with all the signatories of the Warsaw Letter would be needed. They had in fact already agreed to this. Dubcek was somewhat taken aback by this, but after talking it over with his team agreed to the proposal, provided (a) the consultation was on Czechoslovak soil, (b) did not deal with internal Czechoslovak matters, and (c) the Warsaw Letter and Prague's reply to it were left out of the discussion. At this point the Soviets promised that their troops would definitely leave Czechoslovakia.

Arrangements were now quickly finalized. The consultation was fixed for 3 August in Bratislava; a brief joint communiqué

was drafted; and a report on the curious ending to the Cierna talks was sent to Prague. There it was received with anxious reservations. The first impression was that another Munich had befallen the country, that Dubcek had retreated from his original decision to deal with the socialist countries bilaterally only, and that the hardliners, Gomulka and Ulbricht, would lay down the law at Bratislava. These fears were exacerbated by Svoboda's television speech relayed from Kosice, a speech drafted in vague, dogmatic language by Dr Novak, one of Novotny's old aides, now head of the President's Chancellery. Prague students gathered in the Old Town Square demanding 'the truth about Cierna'; dissatisfied with an explanation from Smrkovsky, who had come there straight from the airfield, they went on to the Central Committee building where they received comforting assurances with the same scepticism.

Next morning, 2 August, Cisar told journalists that the Cierna meeting had ended 'very favourably' for Czechoslovakia and that no secret agreements had been made. Soviet forces were on their way out, but it was essential that the press should not give way to too much public jubilation: the Soviet Union and the other signatories of the Warsaw Letter must be given a chance to back down with dignity. Let us, Cisar appealed to them, abstain from polemics. 'We must keep quiet for at least 48 hours.'

The record made by the Czechoslovak delegation shows clearly that Dubcek and the others regarded the Cierna talks as a success, in fact as a 'Czechoslovak victory'. It had brought the annulment of the Warsaw Letter with all its reproaches; the departure of Soviet troops was now guaranteed, and the country's sovereignty had been defended. The negotiators did not, however, see the result as a tactical manoeuvre but as an inter-allied obligation; they were determined to fulfil the agreements to strengthen the Warsaw Pact and so on with as much fanfare as necessary, hoping on the other hand that Moscow would not interfere in Czechoslovak domestic matters.\*

Such was the mood of the Czechoslovak team which left for

\*Star commentator Yuri Zhukov wrote in *Pravda* (6 August 1968) that those politicians in the West who 'hoped for dissension in the socialist camp' had been disappointed. The Bratislava Statement proved their speculations to be wrong since 'this document is yet another step towards deepening all-round co-operation of socialist countries.'

Bratislava on the Friday afternoon. A joint declaration had been drafted in Prague, but no one expected the Soviets to agree to this; indeed the Bratislava meeting was devoted to little else but bargaining over the terms of the communiqué to be issued. The Soviet draft was taken as a basis and worked over paragraph by paragraph. The Czechoslovaks would constantly suggest amendments, then Ulbricht or Gomulka would support the original Soviet version, while Kadar echoed the Czechoslovak view fairly consistently. Finally Brezhnev, or even more frequently Suslov, would come up with a compromise formula. So it went on but the declaration as finally published differed little from the first Soviet draft.

The Czechoslovak delegation, however, was already fairly sure that the heavy clouds which had been gathering over Czechoslovakia since May had now been dispelled and that there would be no fresh crisis at least until the September Congress. The Dubcek leadership needed this respite very badly to consolidate its position at home and in its relations with the Five. Alexander Dubcek returned from Bratislava in an optimistic mood. There were others, however, who did not share this outlook. Among them, naturally enough, was Kriegel, who maintained (at a meeting of the Party's Praesidium) that the Bratislava Declaration was 'loosely worded', that the agreement was a provisional one and that the Party leadership had not prepared any alternative should the situation take a radical change for the worse.

Kriegel's pessimism proved well-founded. The Bratislava Declaration was in fact couched in phrases of extreme ideological orthodoxy. It made almost any interpretation possible. What was one to think, for example, of this crucial paragraph in the Declaration :

Our fraternal parties oppose (with great vigilance and unshakable solidarity) all plots of imperialism and other anti-communist forces, which aim at weakening the leading role of the working class and the communist parties. We will never permit anyone to undermine the bases of the socialist regime. The various tasks necessary to build a socialist society in our respective countries are more easily resolved with mutual aid and support.

Dubcek and his trusted friends gave in on the final text of the

Declaration in the hope that its slogan-like wording would make their own interpretation possible. Three weeks later, in his last letter of warning (19 August), Brezhnev reproached Dubcek explicitly for allowing the principles and obligations spelled out at Bratislava to be ignored or bypassed by the Czechoslovak leadership. In the lengthy article of 22 August, giving the official Soviet reasons for the invasion, *Pravda* stated that the Czechoslovaks

had pledged to take concrete steps to stabilize the situation in the country, to consolidate and defend the achievements of socialism. Yet . . . the Czechoslovak leadership had done nothing to stem the counter-revolution. On the contrary . . .

On the occasion of the first anniversary of the Cierna and Bratislava conferences, the Soviet, Polish and Hungarian press as well as the local Czech hardliners made a major issue of this alleged non-fulfilment of the 'concrete obligations' which Dubcek had taken upon himself at the time. Although these obligations were never properly spelled out, it was argued that had they been energetically fulfilled, the subsequent invasion could have been avoided. The aim of the manoeuvre was clear: to prepare the ground for an official Czechoslovak statement that the military operation by the Five was timely and justified. (This statement was finally issued on 21 August 1969, the first anniversary of the invasion.)

Throughout the post-Bratislava period, Czechoslovakia's loyal partnership in the bloc of socialist countries was repeatedly reaffirmed. On 6 August the Party Praesidium publicly (and several members privately) admonished the journalists: they must take 'Czechoslovak national and international interests' into consideration in everything they wrote. The journalists mostly responded to this appeal with gentlemanly understanding. It was only in the week prior to the invasion that the Czech and Slovak press took exception to the attacks which reappeared in the mass media of the Five; even so, the retort was mild and defensive in nature.\*

On the other hand, however, there were factors which could

\*Press polemics against Czechoslovakia from the Soviet side were resumed on 14 August when *Literaturna Gazeta* attacked its Czech counterpart *Literarni listy*. This sally was followed by a commentary in *Pravda* (16 August), reminding Czechoslovakia of the obligations she had undertaken in Bratislava.

only renew and increase Soviet apprehension. They all bore witness to one basic fact: the Dubcek leadership intended to continue on the course marked out by the January change and the April Action Programme. Socialism in Czechoslovakia was to have a 'human face', and the Communist Party was to be instrumental in this process which was to be far more than an act of cosmetic beautification. The draft Party Statutes (published on 10 August 1968) were one of the proofs that the Party took this face-lift very seriously. These Statutes portrayed a new Communist party whose 'leading role' was no longer arbitrarily decreed. While it remained a 'political reality', it had to be incessantly fought for with ideas and deeds, and its role would moreover be 'controlled by the people'. This in itself would have sufficed to raise Soviet eyebrows. But these new rules stipulated something unheard of in any communist-ruled country – the protection of minority opinions. Views conflicting with the majority opinion might be defended *after* a majority decision had been passed and even raised again, if new evidence warranted it.

This passage must have alarmed even the less dogmatic members of the Soviet Politburo. But there was more. In order to separate Party and state power, the statutes ruled that leading offices in the Party and state administrations must not be combined, and it recommended that important Party offices should not be concentrated in the hands of one person. Rotation of officials was ensured by a provision which limited the tenure of office in elected bodies to three consecutive two-year terms (district committees) or two consecutive four-year terms (central committees). Exceptions must be approved by a two-thirds majority of conference or congress delegates, and then only for one additional term. The conservative stipulation about the length of Party membership required for higher Party office was dropped. Elections of officials were to be carried out by secret ballot.

Some western analysts later argued that 'the only significant public Czechoslovak action taken between the Cierna conference and 14 August when the hostile press campaign of the Five was resumed was the publication of the draft Statutes of 10 August and that this was the crucial event, and accordingly the decision to invade was taken some time between 10 and 14

August.\* Similarly, an analysis for the Institute for Strategic Studies evaluated the publication of the new statutes as an event 'fundamentally alarming' for Moscow and thus 'an incredibly audacious act' on Prague's part. Or was it rather, as the same analysis stressed, 'an illustration of the extent to which they (Dubcek and his government) were unable even to delay measures that they might have thought just and necessary, but momentarily inexpedient'?† In other words, another example of the polarization between external and internal pressures under which Dubcek and his friends so desperately laboured.

Some observers, even Czech and Slovak progressive communists, have since expressed the opinion that 'a tragic misunderstanding' took place at Cierna. But if there was a misunderstanding at all, then it could only refer to the fact that Dubcek and his colleagues did promise verbally to fulfil certain commitments concerning the 'defence of socialist achievements'. These were noted in the minutes but not included in the Bratislava Declaration. In this respect, the subsequent complaints by the Five that these commitments had not been fulfilled were justified to an extent. But even if the Dubcek leadership had lived up to these vague commitments, Moscow would have viewed them rigidly in terms of the interests of a 'socialist super-power'. In other words, it would have evaluated their fulfilment, at best, as insufficient half-measures, as the particular demands were only a part of all those which sprang from Moscow's orthodox interpretations of the whole situation. To quote a single example: in Cierna the Soviet delegation insisted (and the Czechoslovak delegation agreed) that 'order and Party control must be established in the mass media.' For the Soviets this amounted to a promise that full, pre-publication censorship would be reimposed from above;‡ for Dubcek a return to such a discredited Novotny-like measure was unthinkable; nobody, inside or outside the Party, would have accepted the fraudulent formula that, in order to have greater freedom in the future, it would have to be restricted in the present. Consequently,

\*Robert Rhodes James, *The Czechoslovak Crisis 1968*, p. 29.

†Philip Windsor and Adam Roberts, *Czechoslovakia 1968*, pp. 60-61.

‡The Novotny era press law was amended and became law on 29 June 1969, repealing those provisions of the original law which authorized pre-publication censorship. This was a major step in advancing the principles of freedom of the press.

the Czechoslovak leadership simply decided to request journalists to impose a kind of auto-censorship on themselves, and to refrain from publicizing views which might disconcert the Soviets. Although this advice was largely followed, it was in itself an impossible proposition since almost anything that was vaguely critical or deviated from tedious ideological clichés was bound to get on Soviet nerves.

During these three critical weeks, when Moscow watched developments most carefully, weighing the final decision, which would also incur risks for themselves, the oft-postponed visits of Marshal Tito and President Ceaucescu took place. The population gave them a triumphant reception, doubtlessly interpreted in Moscow as a first-rate political provocation. The Czechoslovak Party leadership tried hard not to impart a demonstratively anti-Soviet character to these two visits. Even though he advised the Prague comrades to resist Soviet threats and demands more energetically than they had done at Cierna, Tito fully understood these reservations. He explained that it was always dangerous to conclude agreements with Moscow which were not absolutely clearly worded – the Russians were masters at misusing agreements couched in ideological clichés. At the same time, however, Tito recommended that in domestic matters Dubcek should advance with caution and not ‘weaken the influence of the Party’; while decentralization was useful it required at the same time a ‘strengthening of the centre from which all power emanated’; to abolish censorship was a step in the right direction but the Party had to be sure of the personnel in the mass media; a resolute fight against hardliners and conservatives was a fine move, but one should never forget the ‘excesses of the reformists, and never underestimate the danger of “social-democratism”’. Ceaucescu was also well received in the Czech capital but being – or so it seemed in Prague – a less experienced statesman than Tito, he did not mince his words. He even mentioned the possibility of forming something like the *Little Entente* of pre-war times between Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia – a suggestion which the Dubcekists would have preferred not to hear and which did not escape the attention of Soviet informers.

There were yet other visitors during that crucial period. On 12 August Ulbricht arrived at Karlovy Vary, and there was a

one-day meeting between him and Dubcek at the former's request. Ulbricht played the well-meaning uncle inquiring about his nephew's future plans. He gave repeated assurances of his full confidence in Dubcek and requested the same towards himself. He was interested to know if and when Prague would negotiate with Bonn and whether he would be kept fully informed of such negotiations. He declared that he would like to know about any dealings with the Federal government beforehand. Nothing specific was agreed upon. Convincing though it appears to have been, this good-natured approach might only have been a pose.

When Ulbricht returned from his short visit to Karlovy Vary, he sent an urgent report to Brezhnev in the third week of August, describing the situation in Czechoslovakia in the most alarming terms. Although the Soviets never let them have any precise information about this report, Cernik and Dubcek were able to conclude from various references made to it, that Ulbricht's report had reached Moscow when the preparations for a military intervention in Czechoslovakia had been completed and when the Soviet high command were just waiting for the signal to go.

In this report Ulbricht emphasized all the aspects of Czechoslovak policies which he knew most worried the Russians, painting them in the blackest colours for reasons of self-interest, and insisting that Prague had secret dealings with Bonn and other western countries. He also stressed the rumours that Czechoslovakia and Rumania intended to leave the Warsaw Pact, and that their desire for neutrality would be the death knell of the 'socialist community' in Europe.

It is possible that this report had a decisive influence on Moscow's decision. In any case, shortly after the East German head of state returned from Karlovy Vary, a meeting of the Soviet Communist Party Politburo was called in all haste, on Friday 16 August. At this session the Soviet leaders agreed *unanimously* that the developments of events in Czechoslovakia presented an immediate and lasting danger to the 'political, military and strategic cohesion' of the whole socialist camp, and that its defence capabilities were thus 'seriously shaken and weakened', according to the Soviet generals (Cernik reported this to the government, 26 August). The Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party came to the conclusion – as usual a unanimous



one – that it was no longer possible to halt this development 'from the inside', since the Czechoslovak Communist Party had ceased to be the 'leading force' in the country and that under these conditions the only solution left was a military operation. In the above-mentioned report to the government Cernik added that two members of the Soviet Politburo, Shelepin and Suslov, had expressed their doubts when it came to voting for the solution to be adopted. Their opinion was that, in spite of the undeniable upsurge of counter-revolutionary forces, it was still possible to settle the Czechoslovak affair by political means.

On Saturday 17 August, a conference of all the directors of the country's information media was held in Prague. The atmosphere of this meeting rapidly became gloomy and the pessimism of some participants was striking. Kriegel actually said: 'The sword of Damocles is hanging over our heads, by a thread which weakens with every day.' Contrary to expectations, those taking part in this conference were not received by Dubcek but by the secretary of the Central Committee, Cisar, who explained that the First Secretary was absent because he had had to attend consultations with some highly placed persons 'somewhere in Slovakia'. This was indeed the case, for Dubcek was at that moment in the Slovak town of Komarno for a secret meeting with Janos Kadar.

The First Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party did not conceal the fears he felt for Czechoslovakia from his Czechoslovak colleague; without actually warning him of the imminent invasion he went straight to the point and said that Moscow was preparing to 'resort to extreme measures' if Prague did not immediately and systematically carry out the Bratislava agreement in the sense understood by the Soviets.

Later, Brezhnev, Kadar, Gomulka, Ulbricht and Zhivkov had a secret meeting. Janos Kadar reported on the meeting he had had with Dubcek and stated that the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party 'obstinately stuck to its standpoint' and would not yield, thus making all agreement impossible. It was at this meeting that the heads of the five Parties agreed upon the principle of 'an exemplary and energetic attitude' towards Czechoslovakia.

The General Staff of the Czechoslovak army sent Dubcek a report suggesting that the Warsaw Pact military manoeuvres

of the spring and summer of 1968 gave further support to the hypothesis that they had been strategically aimed at an 'enemy' within Czechoslovakia. This analysis also made it clear that the Czechoslovak General Staff had only ever planned for the possibility of attacks from the West, from the Federal German Republic, and that the frontiers with the German Democratic Republic, Poland, the U.S.S.R. and Hungary were 'without military protection'.

Czechoslovak army specialists agree generally that the motives behind the Soviet decision to intervene militarily were power-political and strategic. The verdict of the Soviet military chiefs was final: if the developments which had arisen in Czechoslovakia had been allowed to proceed, they would have resulted in a general weakening of the Warsaw Pact. Its Czechoslovak member – one of the most important – would have been threatened and would have finally gravely endangered the superior interests of the Soviet power. In his report on 26 August, Cernik commented: 'Moscow decided that it was essential to secure Czechoslovak territory; this action appeared to them both strategically and militarily necessary.'

The political and ideological cohesion of the whole communist bloc was in the balance too. Certain members of the Soviet Politburo criticized the 'hesitation and weakness' in dealing with the Czech question.\* This indecision had particularly worried Walter Ulbricht. At the Dresden conference the latter had

\*In this connection the coded report which the Czechoslovak Ambassador in Moscow, Vladimir Koucky, sent to his government after the invasion, is of interest. His thirty-page report dealt with the reactions of the Soviet Party cells, after the Five had invaded. According to Koucky, some eight hundred Soviet Party organizations expressed their disapproval of the act.

There are some 60,000 Party organizations in the Soviet Union; but in a totalitarian police state such as the U.S.S.R., such criticism of the Party's policy is an unheard-of event. In addition, Koucky reported that the Party leadership received many protests from organizations with a high percentage of intellectuals, not only in Moscow and Leningrad but also from Siberia. Some of these very firmly worded resolutions were sent by the Party organizations of the most important Soviet scientific institutions – particularly those dealing with atomic and cosmic research. Ambassador Koucky also reports a scandal said to have broken out in Moscow television: the Party cell there, which is a very strictly elected elite, had to be called three times to attend a meeting to approve the invasion. This meeting never took place and the expected resolution was never published. Koucky's report also deals with the situation in the Soviet Union in relation to the nationalities problem. It refers to the frequent signs of

already made a dark prophecy, pointing with a sweeping gesture at all the powerful communist party chiefs, gathered round the table: 'If the January line is pursued in Czechoslovakia, all of us run a very grave risk'. Brezhnev is said to have been deeply troubled by these words.

Meanwhile, the 'hawks' in Moscow had other cards to play – the reports sent from Prague by the Soviet Ambassador Chervonenko (as well as those sent independently by agents of Soviet security working in Prague) all of which came to more or less the same conclusions: that the new Party leadership, starting with Dubcek himself, did not have any support in the Party organizations, either civil or military, nor was it popular except with the 'revisionist sections' of the intelligentsia. The embassy added that the great majority of workers supported the U.S.S.R. and that a 'handful of rightists' prevented them from expressing their opinion. The 'first opportunity' would give a victory to the healthy forces in the Party.

On the strength of this, Moscow hoped that the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the five Warsaw Pact armies would be a lightning operation, which, in the space of twenty-four hours, would bring about the formation of a new government and Party leadership, whilst Dubcek, Cernik, Smrkovsky, Kriegel and others would be liquidated as 'traitors'. Some of the Soviet troops would then stay permanently on Czechoslovak soil to safeguard the Soviet Union's military, strategic, political and ideological interests in the country.

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'extreme nationalism', the pressures for the representation of all the main nationalities in the Soviet Party Praesidium and the demands to respect the national structures of the country.

## II Between Prague and Moscow

### CHAPTER ONE

#### 21 AUGUST 1968: THE POLITICAL FAILURE OF A SUCCESSFUL INVASION

I returned to see Hana: 'An idiot who passed me said that the Russians were here.' Her reaction was the same as mine. No, that was unthinkable.

Ladislav Mnacko,  
*The Seventh Night*

It was a sleepy summer night. Almost everybody was away since the traditional annual holiday period was nearing its end, and everybody was making the most of it. Hundreds and thousands of Czechs and Slovaks were abroad: travel documents were so easy to get, never before had bureaucratic red tape been cut down to such a minimum. Brothers and uncles, cousins and friends living in western Europe had been called upon to play the host to tourists whose spirits were high but whose funds in hard currency were quite the opposite. Everything was fine. There was no crisis on the international horizon. Soviet troops had left Czechoslovakia. Hitch-hikers did not have to wait long anywhere once they showed the Czechoslovak flag on their knapsacks. As befitted the season the night of 20-21 August was a warm, sleepy night. At 01.58 people who were still awake and happened to be listening to 'Radio Prague' heard the following announcement: 'Yesterday, on 20 August 1968, at about 2300 hours . . .' then silence. The radio programme had broken down.\*

By that time, however, citizens in their thousands had already been awakened by the steady noise of planes flying at low altitudes. In regions bordering the German Democratic Republic,

\*Programmes broadcast on several short and long waves were able to continue, informing the outside world of the event.

tanks, armoured cars and soldier-loaded trucks were pouring across the border. Their red star markings were covered with newspapers or other materials. Some vehicles bore no markings at all. More manoeuvres, said some. The Russians have come, others maintained. Lights went on in flats in the cities and towns throughout the country. Telephones started to ring. There was hardly any doubt left: the Russians had come. A tank column of the Red Army wound its way through the streets of Prague, guided by the official car of the Soviet Embassy, heading for the building of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. It arrived at its destination at 04.00 hours and about sixty minutes later the huge grey building was occupied. Another column had already reached the Strakovka headquarters of the Prime Minister's office. After a short struggle Cernik was arrested. Prague Airport was already occupied and huge Antonov transport planes were landing at one-minute intervals.

Finally, at 04.30 in the morning, Radio Prague gave signs of life again with the following announcement: 'Wake up your friends, wake them up right now, early as it is, wake up your neighbours and all other citizens. In a few moments Czechoslovak radio will broadcast an extremely important announcement. Stay by your sets, wake up all your friends. In a few moments. . .' The announcer then read an Appeal to all the People of Czechoslovakia, issued at 01.00 hours by the Praesidium of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, and approved by all members of this body except four:

Yesterday, 20 August 1968, at about 11 p.m., the troops of the U.S.S.R., the Polish People's Republic, the German Democratic Republic, the Hungarian People's Republic and the Bulgarian People's Republic, crossed the state borders of the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia.

This happened without the knowledge of the President of the Republic, the Chairman of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister of the government and the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. At the time, the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Communist Party was in session, discussing preparations for the Fourteenth Party Congress. The Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's Central Committee calls upon all citizens of the Republic to maintain calm

and not to resist the invaders, as the defence of our eastern frontiers is now impossible.

Likewise, neither our army, nor the security forces, nor the Workers' Militia have been ordered to defend the country. The Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Party's Central Committee considers this act not only contradictory to the fundamental principles of relations between socialist states, but also a negation of all the fundamental norms of international law.

All the leading officials of the Party and National Front will retain the posts to which they have been elected as representatives of the people and members of their organizations, in conformity with the laws and other statutes in force in Czechoslovakia. The constitutional leaders are immediately calling a session of the National Assembly and the government of the Republic; the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Communist Party is calling a plenary session of the Party's Central Committee to examine the new situation.

Thus opened the most extraordinary week in the history of Czechoslovakia.\* Indeed, the way in which fourteen million citizens were given teleguidance for seven days and the spirit in which it was done, when their country was invaded by a vastly superior force, is a history in itself, one yet to be evaluated from the sociological and political point of view. One of the most spectacular pages of this history was written by the mass media, particularly Czechoslovak radio and television, which became a government in the full sense of the word. There does not seem to be any other example in modern history of telecommunications taking over not only the function of a government but also directing a clandestine, spirited, but non-violent resistance of a whole nation. This government of the air was accorded full recognition by the population. It was respected, trusted, and its instructions minutely followed. Its orders – spread by transistors and word of mouth – were executed with astonishing speed and efficiency. Street and road signs disappeared within minutes or

\*The story of the first seven days of the invasion is well known thanks to the 'Black Book', a collective work by a group of Czech historians: *Sedm prazskych dnu: 21-27 srpen 1968*. Published by the Historicky ustav C.S.A.V., Prague, September 1968. Excerpts from this unique and detailed document were published in English: Robert Littell (ed.), *The Czech Black Book*, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1969.

were changed to confuse the occupying forces. Secret-police cars were identified and tailed. The invader was constantly fooled as to his actual location or as to the key buildings in any given town. In various parts of the country, the 'fraternal' armed units involuntarily retraced their steps and even shot at each other – all due to 'information' received from the population. The sense of national unity was never stronger. Old-time communists, among them even hardliners and renowned Stalinists, stood by the people and some of those who had, under the communist regime, suffered privation and even imprisonment were ready to enter the Party.

But all this – including the surprisingly purposeful and at times heroic attitude of the young, too often considered as hopelessly indolent hippies – was true only for a while. It was not the first time in Czech history that the people were more duty-conscious and courageous than their leaders. There is ample evidence that during these August days the majority of Czechs and Slovaks wanted to defend their country. Not so their leaders with the good Alexander Dubcek at their head. However, it must be said in their defence, that throughout the crisis with Moscow hardly any of them had believed that military invasion was a real possibility. If at times they considered it one of the *alternatives* open to Moscow as a solution to the crisis, they always believed it to be a desperate move which they would be able to avert by last-minute negotiation. In any case, this drastic alternative had been almost forgotten in Prague during the warm August days after the Bratislava Declaration. It came as lightning out of a blue sky, for, in all truthfulness, Moscow had had better chances to occupy the country, involving less actual cost and loss of prestige, for example during the Warsaw Pact spring and summer manoeuvres. When he was first told of the invasion, Dubcek himself declared, with tears in his eyes :

On my honour as a communist, I declare that I had not the slightest idea nor had I received the slightest indication that anyone proposed taking such measures against us. . . I, who have devoted my whole life to collaboration with the Soviet Union, now they do this to me ! This is the tragedy of my life !\*

\*Unconfirmed reports have it that Dubcek was informed by General Prchlik about the imminence of the invasion about a week before the event. If true, Dubcek would almost certainly have brushed aside such information as alarmist. Czechoslovak border guards and probably other military units

This touching, emotional outburst came late during a prolonged session of the Party's Praesidium which opened, as usual, at the Central Committee building in Prague on 20 August at 14.00 hours. Two items were on the agenda: the first was a draft report on the preparations for the convocation of the Fourteenth Extraordinary Congress; the other, a long report entitled 'Draft Statement of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party on the Situation Inside the Country After the Conclusion of Negotiations in Cierna nad Tisou and in Bratislava and Prior to the Extraordinary Fourteenth Congress'.\* This long report was prepared by the so-called 'Central Information, Plans and Management Unit', attached to the Central Committee Secretariat. Actually, the final recommendations to be considered and approved by the Praesidium were worked out by Praesidium member Drahomir Kolder and Party secretary Alois Indra. This in itself was nothing out of the ordinary, if it had not been for Kolder's insistence – when Dubcek opened the fateful Tuesday Praesidium session with an exposé concerning Point One of the agenda – that his report be discussed first. However, Kolder was outvoted and it was only late in the evening that the Kolder-Indra draft came under discussion. It was given a rough time: comrade Kriegel declared that the Report contained material taken straight from the Warsaw Letter of the Five, defaming Czechoslovakia; Cernik suggested that all this amounted to treachery.

The discussion dragged on, out of all proportion. Bilak (who, incidentally, arrived at the session in his private car accompanied by a driver/bodyguard instead of in his official limousine)

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did report on troop concentrations along the Czechoslovak border, notably in East Germany. But even these reports could have been considered normal in view of the recent and forthcoming Warsaw Pact manoeuvres. The simplest explanation is, however, that Dubcek did not believe that Moscow would decide to move against Czechoslovakia militarily.

\*The paper was published a year later under the title: 'Report on the Current Political Situation in the C.S.S.R. and on the Conditions Under Which the C.P.C.S. Pursues its Activity' (see *Rude pravo*, 2 July 1969). The belated publication of the report was part of the summer 1969 drive to discredit Dubcek's policies. This particular report was intended to prove that the 'healthy forces' in the Party had warned the leadership about the dangers which allegedly threatened the 'leading role of the Party' and that Dubcek had ignored these warnings.



suggested that the report contained 'useful passages', while Piller declared that it was 'a work commanding respect'. Kolder himself insisted that he would present the report at the next Central Committee plenum even if it were to be rejected by the Praesidium. This was an unusual statement, to say the least. But Kolder, Indra and several other conspirators were in the picture and knew their task: to divide the Praesidium and prepare the ground for a split before hour H which (as only they knew) was fast approaching.

The plan of the Soviets and their helpers was obviously the following: in the eleven-member Praesidium, Bilak, Kolder and Svestka were designated to force the decisive vote (Indra, another fully informed conspirator, as mere Party secretary, had no voting rights). Against these three votes there were five 'reformist' votes: Dubcek, Cernik, Kriegel, Spacek and Smrkovsky. Three additional votes (those of Piller, Barbirek and Rigo) were needed to swing the balance in favour of the conspirators. Once this was done, the traitors were to call on the 'fraternal armies' of the Five to march in and help in quelling the 'counter-revolution'. However, there was a hitch. Rigo voted with the conspirators but Piller and Barbirek failed to perform: either they were not fully informed of what was at stake and what the plan was, or, at the last minute, they changed their minds.\*

Other strange things were happening elsewhere on that Tuesday. In the afternoon, at the Ministry of the Interior, Vice-Minister V. Salgovic† called an extraordinary session of the 'faithful' officials of the state security forces; orders were given on how to proceed in the night to follow. Sulek, director of C.T.K. (Czechoslovak Press Agency) who had been suspended for his dogmatic views earlier in the year, suddenly returned to Prague that very day, entered the C.T.K. building and issued an order that all dispatches intended for abroad had to be approved by him personally. Another suspended director, this time of Czechoslovak Radio (Milos Marko), also made a surpris-

\*For a biased version of the events of the night Praesidium session see *Rude pravo*, 21 August 1969. For a dogmatic interpretation of the policy of the Five throughout the crisis, see Vasil Bilak interview in *Rude pravo* 3 September 1969.

†During the war, Salgovic was in the Soviet Union, and rose to the rank of Colonel in the N.K.V.D. (K.G.B.).

ing appearance in the main broadcasting house in Prague just before midnight, and declared that he was taking over. A little later, another dogmatist (if not worse), former Minister of Culture Hoffmann, currently head of the Centre of Communications in Prague, ordered his technicians to switch off all transmitters. The order was executed at the prearranged moment, preventing the broadcast of the Praesidium's Appeal to all the people of Czechoslovakia. It was not till 04.30 that the transmitters were in working order again. Similarly, Soviet agents and Czech conspirators took over the control tower of Prague Airport. In lieu of the silenced Czech transmitters, a powerful new station began to operate under the name of 'Vltava', broadcasting in Czech and Slovak. Due to the contents and presentation of programmes (several announcers spoke with an accent) it became obvious at once that the new transmitter was run by the occupying forces. From then on, Czech and Slovak programmes, coming from clandestine studios, called themselves 'legal' or 'free' Czechoslovak radio stations.

But let us return to the night session of the Praesidium. Prime Minister Cernik left the meeting several times to make telephone calls. On the other end of the line was Defence Minister Dzur who informed the Prime Minister about large concentrations of troops along Czechoslovakia's borders. Secretary Indra, too, left the meeting repeatedly in order to keep his Soviet masters informed. What he told them was not too encouraging: the conspirators were unable to gain a majority, the discussion continued, and the call upon the 'fraternal armies' could not be made. Perhaps the Soviets in Prague tried to revise the original plan at the last moment but it was already too late and the situation too complicated. (An absurd detail: Indra was able to telephone undetected to the Soviet Embassy since an earlier order from Interior Minister Pavel put an end to the tapping of calls made to and from the Central Committee building.)

At 23.40 Cernik returned to the meeting for the last time. Deathly pale he called for a suspension of the discussions and then announced: 'The troops of the Five countries have crossed the frontiers of our Republic and are occupying us.' According to an eyewitness present at this moment,

It was a shock. . . . At least for some of us, and especially for

comrade Dubcek, who said: 'What a tragedy, I was not expecting this'. Others reacted in the same way. As far as I could observe, Kolder, Bilak and Indra did not seem surprised, but I could not say the same for Svestka. Then comrade Dubcek read a letter he had received during Monday night from the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party. No one had seen this letter till then.\* The Soviet Party's Central Committee reproached our Party for not respecting the agreements reached at Cierna and Bratislava, stressing that there were counter-revolutionary tendencies in our country, repeating the reproaches contained in the Warsaw Letter, only more bitterly. Comrade Dubcek reacted to certain passages in the letter as he read it: 'That is their claim, but they are not taking the situation into account at all, and we are taking measures.' He continued reading the letter, which did not give the slightest indication – this should be stressed – of what they intended to do to resolve the problem or how they intended to do it – i.e. by a military occupation.†

No measures for military defence had been taken or even anticipated by Prague. In the first hours of the invasion the Czechoslovak armed forces remained without orders, causing several regional commanders to make frantic calls to the Ministry of Defence. But the traitor Salgovic and Soviet officers were already in charge there. Not until 01.00 hours on 21 August did the Praesidium issue directions that the armed forces should not oppose the invading armies but 'remain in their barracks'. The subsequent Appeal to all the People confirmed this decision. The People's Militia were advised 'to prevent, above all, the

\*The following is the background to this letter: on 17 August, the Soviet Party Central Committee met in Moscow and the only thing on the agenda was Czechoslovakia; it seems however that this plenary session did not settle the question. According to reliable Soviet sources, a resolution was adopted to take 'severe measures' of a yet unspecified nature against the 'anti-socialist forces' in Czechoslovakia. The letter was sent as a last attempt. Probably it was not so much intended to avert the worst as to provide a justification for the imminent invasion, purely for the sake of form. For tactical reasons – mainly to avoid furnishing the hardliners with arguments against his policies – Dubcek had put the letter away in his pocket and kept its contents secret till the dramatic night of 21 August.

A year later, Husak was to accuse Dubcek of having kept certain vital information to himself during this crisis. In his speech on 19 August 1969 for the anniversary of the invasion, Husak said that Dubcek had not informed his colleagues in the Praesidium of his meeting with Kadar in Komarno on 17 August or about the letter he received on 19 August from the Soviet Politburo addressed to the Czechoslovak Praesidium.

†*Rude pravo*, 23 August 1968.

disappearance of arms which might fall into the hands of unauthorized persons. . . . The militia fulfilled this task.' (*Zivot strany*, 9 October 1968.)

The decision not to resist a vastly superior aggressor, and thus avoid a battle almost certainly lost in advance, is not unknown in Czech history. The mood of the nation – as far as it is possible to evaluate it with any precision – inclined towards armed resistance, anyway certainly among the young. As the months went by, a passionate though unpublicized debate spread through the country. One simple question lay at the centre of this storm of discussion: should we have fought, resisted and lost, or given up without a shot? The Party leadership, Dubcek included, tried to avoid the issue, implying that all armed resistance would have been irresponsible as well as hopeless. Smrkovsky, sensing the question on everybody's lips, declared after his forced trip to Moscow:

Our country was occupied by a tremendous military power;\* to resist it in the same manner would have been absolutely hopeless and was out of the question. . . . I would like to assure you that in Moscow, while negotiating the Protocol, we acted and made decisions as patriots and soldiers.†

In retrospect, the all-night meeting of the Praesidium paints a curious picture of a group of former revolutionaries, representing as they did the supreme power in the country, in a situation of dire emergency, be it an unusual one. At a moment of crucial decisions, shock, recriminations, political and ideological self-justification, even moral indignation, but, above all, resentment at the betrayal by 'class friends', dominated the discussion

\*These figures were given by Central Committee member Frybert on 31 August: 250,000 men (29 divisions), 7,500 tanks, 1,000 aeroplanes.

†On Czechoslovak Radio, on 29 August 1968, other leaders tried to bury the issue under heaps of flowery words. Secretary Cisar wrote (in *Kvety*, No. 42, 26 October 1968): 'Recently I have heard this view: for fifty years we have been building up perhaps one of the best armies in Europe but it seems to no avail since our army does not guarantee our sovereignty. For fifty years we have been looking for an ally to preserve our existence as a small country but it seems that our allies use us exclusively as a pawn on the chessboard. What can we do? How can we live? – I can understand the origins of this question but I cannot agree with its hopelessness. We have every reason to be proud of our army. After all, the glory and honour of a soldier does not consist only in war laurels but sometimes also in the art of not engaging in a lost battle.'

of the highest Party organizations. Otherwise there were comings and goings, inspired by the desire to handle the crisis *solely* in a legal and even democratic way: a convocation of the National Assembly, of the government, of the Central Committee was arranged. . .

Thus, while the comrades assembled in the Central Committee building in Prague gave vent to their moral revulsion, the invading armies were speedily taking up their prearranged positions. (Several eye-witnesses have said that some of the officers directing the occupation of key points in certain cities were the same that had taken part in the Warsaw Pact summer manoeuvres.) From the strategic point of view, the invasion of Czechoslovakia on the night of 20–21 August took place according to plan; the Soviet generals had every reason to be satisfied. The country was invaded and occupied practically without a shot being fired.\* The traitors in the top Czechoslovak leadership were taken to the Soviet Union by military planes to be dealt with there. Others dispersed or went into hiding. The Soviet military fulfilled their mission in an exemplary manner. It was now up to the politicians to take over.

Here the trouble started. For a number of reasons, partly due to the spirited resistance of the people, partly to the almost incredible lack of preparations and measures on the part of the occupying powers, the military victory was almost immediately transformed into a first-rate political catastrophe. An even more surprising fact became apparent – the Soviets had not evolved any alternative plan in case the original one failed.

The main points of the plan can be summarized as follows, and help to throw light on how it failed:

1. Dubcek's group could not be forced into a minority during the meeting of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's Praesidium on 21 August, thus removing all possibility of calling for the help of the allied armies. This accident prevented the original plan from being carried out and explains why the High Command of the five armies claimed in its first statement that the invading armies had entered Czechoslovakia 'at the call of

\*There were, of course, some killed and wounded; according to unofficial figures, more than eighty people were killed. All the victims were civilians shot at by Soviet soldiers or wounded by stray Soviet bullets.

certain leading figures in the Party and state'. Two years later Moscow tried to substantiate this assertion on the basis of evidently flimsy 'proofs'.

2. The leading officials of Czechoslovak radio and television who had long been working for the Soviets, did not succeed in putting the information media at the disposal of the aggressors. In fact quite the contrary happened; the extraordinary resistance organized by the journalists and officials of the radio and television completely disorientated the occupying troops who had been ordered to take over control of the information media. Instead of putting themselves at the service of the occupying forces they led a resistance movement of the whole nation with exceptional brilliance, thus contributing to the defeat of policies pursued by the Soviets.

3. The occupying forces did not succeed in disrupting the telecommunications network in an effective and lasting way. Thus at 9.30 on the morning of 21 August, Polednak (a member of the Assembly) was able to let President Svoboda know by telephone that a meeting of the National Assembly's bureau had proposed to call a plenary session, which was to condemn the invasion. The President of the Republic, who was already completely isolated in his residence in Prague Castle, was also kept informed of new developments by certain members of the government, who managed to reach him by telephone and even to see him in person, entering the castle by devious means. This was a great consolation to General Svoboda who had been given false reports of the government's resignation. The only political undertaking attempted by the Soviets was to arrange that the President of the Republic would nominate a new 'revolutionary workers' and peasants' government' led by Indra. This was the gist of leaflets given out by the occupation troops on the morning of 21 August: some of them even said that Novotny would be reappointed head of state. However, the failure of this attempt was soon common knowledge and the 'Black Book' describes how Soviet soldiers could be seen burning bundles of these compromising leaflets.

4. Towards noon the Soviet Ambassador Chervonenko went to Prague Castle accompanied by Indra and Pavlovsky, a former Czechoslovak Ambassador to Moscow, to persuade the President of the Republic to nominate a new government in order to

'avoid the worst'. To Chervonenko's great surprise, President Svoboda not only refused to negotiate but even told the delegation to leave the premises immediately. At midday, Moscow received another blow: a widespread general strike; an hour later the 'free radio' broadcast a declaration signed by the majority of government members: 'all those who had been able to meet together' condemned the occupation and stated they would continue as the country's legal government.

In the security sections of the Ministry of the Interior which the Soviets had firmly counted on, the situation was catastrophic; not only had the Soviet agents failed to gain control of the ministry, but, engaged as they were in attacking their fellow-countrymen, they were soon being searched for themselves, as the free radio was broadcasting the registration numbers of their cars. The security forces loyal to Minister Pavel finally arrested all the Soviet agents who had managed to capture Cisar, secretary of the Central Committee. Salgovic was quickly unmasked as a conspirator in the pay of the Soviets.

5. On the second day of the occupation, President Svoboda still refused to form a new government and demanded of Moscow a representative competent to discuss the situation – tantamount to refusing to deal with Chervonenko. During the night of 21–22 August a group of pro-Soviet collaborators (Indra, Bilak, Kolder and some others) held a meeting at the Hotel Praha with some Soviet officers but were not able to make any concrete proposals. These traitors had been completely put out by the enormous national resistance to the occupying forces. The underhand deals then made at the Soviet Embassy had the same negative results, for a quarrel broke out between Indra and Pavlovsky as both wanted to be the Prime Minister. Ambassador Chervonenko was then obliged to inform Moscow of President Svoboda's refusal to form a government and report on the 'disagreeable and hostile' reaction of the population to the troops of the five armies.

6. A new defeat for the Soviets' plans came with the decision to call the Fourteenth Extraordinary Congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, which met in best James Bond style in a factory at Vysocany. This congress confirmed that there was no split in the Party, unifying it even further. Thus the ultimatum of the High Command of the occupying forces, demanding that a government with Indra, Pavlovsky, Bilak, Kolder and Lenart

be formed by 6 p.m. on 22 August at the very latest, remained unfulfilled.

In the evening of 22 August Brezhnev was forced to accept that Ambassador Chervonenko's description of the situation in Czechoslovakia before the invasion was mistaken. Moscow acceded to President Svoboda's demands and agreed that he should come to the Soviet capital to negotiate at the highest level. The first stage of this political undertaking, which the Soviets had planned to achieve by military means, ended in defeat.



CHAPTER TWO  
IN THE KREMLIN

PRESIDENT Svoboda's plane left Prague for Moscow on Friday 23 August at 9.30 a.m. The Czechoslovak government had chosen ministers Husak, Dzur and Kucera to attend the President but, at the last moment, Ambassador Chervonenko announced to President Svoboda that the Soviet Politburo would refuse to take part in any conversations in which Indra, Bilak and Piller were not included. The three of them went to Moscow too, but in a separate plane.

A grand reception was organized for President Svoboda at Vnukovo Airport, but as soon as the doors of the Kremlin shut behind them his smiling hosts turned into wild beasts. At this kind of talks, especially when they are at 'summit level', the Soviets have always been in the habit of using all sorts of psychological pressures ranging from intimidation to threats and blackmail. The opponent is kept isolated, cut off from information, to shatter his will to resist and even to impair the mental faculties needed for negotiations. These methods were now tried on President Svoboda; they hoped to bring him to the point where he would renounce the slightest desire to oppose, and finally capitulate.

The first meeting lasted only five minutes. The proceedings were extremely simple: President Svoboda refused to discuss anything unless and until other members of the Praesidium would be allowed to attend, notably Dubcek, Cernik and Smrkovsky. The Soviet side was adamant and resorted to threats: either a revolutionary government of workers and peasants was to be proclaimed at once, a formal proclamation saying that Czechoslovakia was threatened by counter-revolution was to be issued, and the entry of the troops legalized – or Moscow would have no choice but to declare Bohemia and Moravia autonomous regions under Soviet administration, and Slovakia a Soviet

Republic. A participant at the Moscow negotiations wrote in his personal notebook :

The first part of the negotiations were restricted to Svoboda and the Soviet spokesmen. Svoboda was repeatedly asked to take over the function of Prime Minister and First Party Secretary, in addition to that of President of the Republic. Svoboda categorically rejected these demands and requested the presence of other Czechoslovak spokesmen. . . Given the resolute stand of our President, the Soviet side finally had no alternative but to agree.

Later, our delegation was presented with five alternative solutions. Our representatives refused to discuss these alternatives as a whole, and requested that each of these demands be negotiated separately. The first point was a request for cadre changes in the leadership of the Party and of the state. To this end, the Soviet side was to prepare the composition of a so-called Revolutionary Council of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. The Soviet delegation demanded with particular insistence the fulfilment of an undertaking which amounted to the elimination of Dubcek, Cernik, Smrkovsky and possibly also Svoboda, for whom there would not have been any political future. It was mainly thanks to the extraordinary unity of our citizens who backed these comrades without exception that the Soviet side had to give in finally. It was interesting that the Soviets justified the invasion of Czechoslovakia not by the imminent danger of counter-revolution in our country, but by the alleged securing of our frontiers in accordance with the Yalta and Potsdam agreements.

The first meeting ended with President Svoboda declaring that his own fate was not a matter of concern to him, that he was old and did not cling to life. Whereupon he retired to the apartment reserved for him in the Kremlin. Meanwhile the Politburo of the Soviet Party remained in session without respite to keep up with the latest news from Prague and to check from time to time if Svoboda 'was in a better frame of mind'. Brezhnev communicated with him by letter, alternately threatening and conciliatory, but to no end. At the same time, something happened which would normally have been of distinctly minor importance, if it had not had such great influence on the situation. President Svoboda, tired, depressed and isolated as he was, asked Brezhnev in one of his letters for permission to telephone his wife. This was granted and Prague Castle was contacted by

means of military telephone lines. Mrs Svoboda reacted to her husband's call with great effect. This is the gist of what she said: 'There is shooting here in Prague, it's a blood bath, but the people are with you, Ludvik, don't be afraid, don't budge an inch, everybody loves you, but everything depends on you and you must help us!' Mrs Svoboda's voice and her moving appeal were a great comfort to the President, giving him new strength. To some extent the evil spell of isolation surrounding him in the Kremlin apartments had been broken.

It was not till the evening of 23 August that the abducted Prague leaders were brought to Moscow. They were able to have a quick wash and change and refresh themselves generally, but they were not allowed to get in touch with President Svoboda. Brezhnev and Kosygin negotiated with Dubcek and Cernik alone. They naturally had no idea what had been said before their arrival and knew nothing of President Svoboda's attitude, nor even if the latter were still alive, and, if so, where. It was therefore extremely difficult for them to distinguish truth from cunning distortions in everything the Soviets said. Alexander Dubcek, physically exhausted and morally broken, would only repeat that in President Svoboda's absence he would not and could not say, decide or sign anything and that in any case his personal fate was a matter of complete indifference to him.

The discussions were taken up again on Saturday 24 August. This time it was a plenary session with Svoboda, Cernik, Dubcek and others present. The President of the Republic sent a message to Prague, asking that until the Czechoslovak delegation returned 'nothing should be undertaken that might place the Moscow talks in an even more critical situation'. The negotiations – if one can call them that – lasted two days, as the Soviets laid down very harsh conditions which they reinforced with unscrupulous blackmail. 'We have already got the better of other little nations, so why not yours too?' Brezhnev reminded them and added; 'As for the intellectuals, put your minds at rest, in fifty years there will be a new generation, healthier than this one!'

Some members of the Czechoslovak delegation tried various evasive tactics, such as requesting permission to return to Prague and consult with the government and the National Assembly. To support these attempts at escape, a letter was dispatched from Prague on 25 August, signed by representatives of the

Praesidium of the National Assembly, the Czechoslovak Government and the Praesidium of the Party's Central Committee, suggesting 'a temporary, short suspension of negotiations . . . so that comrades Dubcek, Smrkovsky, Cernik and others might return to Prague'. The letter was never delivered. In any case, Brezhnev had not the least intention of letting his captives out of their cage as long as they had not signed a capitulation. To strengthen their position, the Soviets arranged for the hardliner Svestka to come to the Soviet capital, although they made similar arrangements for Zdenek Mlynar, a progressive and intelligent Party official. In this way Mlynar was able to inform Svoboda of the situation in Czechoslovakia as early as 24 August. The news was encouraging: nationwide resistance to the occupying forces faultlessly directed by radio and television, the successful conclusion of the Party Congress, the excellent fighting spirit of the people, especially the young, unity between the people and the Party, the loyalty of the security forces, of the army and even of the People's Militia, the dismissal of Salgovic and the continued functioning of the National Assembly, the government and the administrative organs.

The decisive and most difficult phase of the Moscow negotiations was right at the end – during the night of 25 August and the next day, right up to the departure of the Czechoslovak delegation. Brezhnev, Kosygin and other members of the Politburo finally accepted the fact that it was useless to persist in the attempt to form a 'workers' and peasants' revolutionary government' in Czechoslovakia. Consequently they had to resign themselves to approving the continued tenure of office of all the leaders whom they had originally intended to annihilate politically and even physically. This conclusion was reinforced by the fact that it was now completely apparent that people like Indra and Svestka were politically unusable – at least for the moment. However, the Soviets kept open the possibility of calling on their services in the future. (7th Article of Moscow Protocol.)

The pressure to which the Prague delegates were subjected was tremendous. Some of them were already on the verge of nervous breakdown (Dubcek himself fainted twice while in the Soviet capital). On the other hand, some, for example Gustav Husak, were never attacked by the Soviets. Mlynar described the negotiations (at the Central Committee meeting of the Czecho-

slovak Party of 31 August in Prague): 'One cannot label as immoral what was accepted under pressure and in . . . entirely unsuitable conditions.'

Smrkovsky, as usual, was quite explicit in his radio address (on 29 August):

These last few days have been the most difficult in my whole life. . . Our negotiations in Moscow were of an extraordinary type. You know that we did not travel there together and you know also the circumstances under which some of us got there and negotiated there. I hope you don't expect me to go into this any further: this is too heavy and painful a subject for me as it is for comrade Dubcek and the others.\* . . . Our decisions were not easy to make. It took us practically a whole day and a whole night, and we were aware that our decision might be considered by the nation and by history as unacceptable and treasonable. . . . We also considered the fact that, at certain times, there is nothing left to do but reject a conformist settlement that, in the interest of the honour and character of a people, it is better to bare one's breast to the bayonets. However, we concluded that such an extreme moment had not yet come. . . . Please believe that we did not keep silent, that we had sharp arguments with our Soviet counterparts – and among ourselves – we used all possible arguments. . . I would like to ask you, dear fellow-citizens, to have a certain understanding for us as well, since the heavy burden of negotiation and decision fell on our shoulders. We too had to deal and act and decide in the shadow of the tanks and planes on our territory.

For a long time to come the members of the Czechoslovak delegation will discuss what they should finally have done on the fourth day of the Moscow talks: whether to have made them drag on or to have broken them up in a brutal way and found out whether the Soviets would have granted more substantial concessions if they refused to sign the Moscow Protocol etc. These were unanswerable questions and there were different opinions on the matter which reflected the split in the Czechoslovak Communist Party leadership. This deepened increasingly

\*Later, in a private conversation, Smrkovsky confessed that he would rather commit suicide than go through the experience in Moscow again where he was 'humiliated and insulted'. Similarly, Dubcek told friends that after being transported to Moscow in handcuffs, he abandoned all hope of ever returning home.

in the first weeks of the occupation. Gustav Husak and, to a certain extent, President Svoboda did their utmost to come to an understanding with the Russians, whereas Dubcek and especially Smrkovsky tried to put off signing the agreement, pointing out that the composition of the delegation was purely fortuitous, and had no mandate enabling it to sign such an important treaty. Therefore it was absolutely essential to return to Prague and have the text ratified by the government and the National Assembly. It is not impossible that the Soviet Politburo, which was visibly taken aback by the political failure of its military expedition, might have accepted such a compromise. But, seeing the differences which divided the Czechoslovak delegation even at the most critical moments, the Soviets had no reason to be conciliating.

A member of the Czechoslovak delegation in Moscow even commented :

It will always be questionable whether we conducted the Moscow negotiations last August in the most effective manner possible. It cannot be denied that we could have extorted far more than we did from the Russians. For example Brezhnev was obviously ready to bargain as far as Bilak, Indra and co. were concerned. We should have been able to gain something much more substantial in exchange for our agreement to paragraph 11 of the Protocol; for example we might have arranged to eliminate the conservatives definitely. Of course, we all realized that we would have to accept the Soviets' main demand – the presence of their army on our territory – but it was essential to find out at exactly what price. In fact, our first bid was too modest only because we remained loyal to one of our old principles : there are no such things as little gains.

Other high Party officials who remained in Prague during the crucial negotiations in the Soviet capital were of the opinion that President Svoboda decided to go to Moscow too early. It was obvious that the Russians were taken aback by Chervonenko's, Indra's and Pavlovsky's failure to form a government and take over the administration of the country. And it was no less obvious that Moscow had no alternative plans for the situation thus created. It was exactly this lack of alternative plan which could have been used by Svoboda, to let the Soviets stew in their own juice. Only then should he have offered to fly to Moscow to save the Russians' face and help them out of a

degrading situation and a stalemate.

But history cannot be related with 'ifs'. At midnight, on 26 August 1968, the capitulation document – later known as the Moscow Protocol – was signed by the Soviet and Czechoslovak representatives, with one exception: Frantisek Kriegel, 'the Galician Jew', refused to put his signature. The Soviets could not care less, they had other plans as far as he was concerned. The text of this Protocol was never made public either in Moscow or in Prague – and in fact Article 14 stipulated that the contents of the agreement should remain strictly confidential. However, certain officials of the Czechoslovak Communist Party saw to it that the text did not remain secret and sent a copy to *Svedectvi*, a quarterly review published in Paris. In this way, the document became known. (A full translation can be found in Appendix A.)

It is a curious document, one of the rare international agreements concluded between two communist parties, in which one dictates to the other, thus showing certain political, ideological and organizational preferences and demands. The Protocol's lack of formality probably testifies to the lack of time but also to hard bargaining on the part of certain members of the Czechoslovak team. This team was far from unanimous or united. If we consider that for various reasons (non-membership in the Praesidium, political or personal timidity, opportunism) Svoboda, Kucera, Koucky, Husak, Lenart, Dzur, Cernik took a centrist position, it is evident that the progressives were clearly in a minority: Dubcek, Smrkovsky, Simon, Spacek, Mlynar against Bilak, Barbirek, Piller, Rigo, Svestka, Jakes and Indra. Consequently, there are harsh provisions in the Protocol; others are so vaguely worded as to permit practically any interpretation (here the pattern of the Bratislava Declaration was followed closely). The Czechs successfully refuted a point considered extremely important by the Soviet Party leadership: namely, that the danger of counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia was a real one and that the armies of the Five marched in to liquidate it. It took another year, the fall of Dubcek and the full re-Stalinization of the Party and the country before this thesis was officially accepted in Prague.

Once the Protocol was signed, the Czechoslovak delegation had its reward and was allowed to return home to Prague.

Nevertheless at the last moment before their departure they had occasion to experience the fourth dimension of Soviet politics: when all assembled on the tarmac at the airport, the delegation had the disagreeable surprise of discovering that one of their number, Frantisek Kriegel, was missing. The Soviet partisans of Aryan purity, who had refused to have him at the conference table,\* obviously wanted to keep him in reserve for a possible trial of 'zionists' and other Czech deviationists. But Dubcek and his friends refused to go without Kriegel. After several hours of waiting the Chairman of the National Front, a full member of the Party Praesidium, was brought to the airport and was finally able to leave with the rest of the delegation.

The delegation arrived in Prague at dawn on 27 August, almost incognito, without formalities, without an official welcome, without journalists. They all withdrew immediately to Prague Castle to rest a little before deciding what the population should be told about the Moscow negotiations, how it should be said and by whom. The nation's feelings had in fact been somewhat mixed. There was joyful relief: not only had Dubcek's team all come back from Moscow intact as you might say but it was also reinstated, which really did seem a miracle. Yet with this went impatience to know what the cost had been. A nation of fourteen million men and women had been waiting under great strain for the results of the Moscow negotiations, with an inner foreboding that the news would be bad.

It was not till 2.40 p.m. on 27 August that the radio broadcast a communiqué on the Moscow agreement. Immediately after, President Svoboda addressed the nation. The effect this speech had was summarized by a member of the Party Praesidium: 'You would think it was poor President Hacha speaking . . . it is another Munich.' The enormous majority of the population thought exactly the same thing. 'It's not an agreement, it's

\*Another person not allowed to enter the Kremlin was Nikita Khrushchev. He emerged from retirement and came to the Kremlin on the second day of the negotiations (24 August). In an excited state, he demanded that Brezhnev be told his opinion: no half measures should be used in settling the Czechoslovak crisis! Either you exploit your military action politically by imposing a government to your liking or you should never have engaged in the whole expedition. The main thing is not to compromise! After his message had been received, Nikita Khrushchev was escorted back to the gates without being allowed to get in contact with Brezhnev personally.



a dictate', thousands of Prague's factory workers told the radio over the telephone. 'This is a capitulation extorted by shameful means', added the 40,000 workers of the Skoda works in Pilsen. The National Assembly announced in a special communiqué that it 'reserved the right to examine the communiqué and the government's statements and to act in a way that would preserve the liberty and sovereignty of the country'.

Such was the atmosphere when Dubcek's voice was finally heard. His unforgettable speech, broken by sobs and lapses, had a shattering effect on all who heard it – that is, almost all the Czechs and Slovaks; the whole country felt a deep sympathy for the political and human fate of the Communist Party's First Secretary. But this did not mean it was prepared to accept 'another Munich'. The main argument of Dubcek's speech rested on the assurance, repeated again and again, that the Moscow agreement was based on the 'progressive withdrawal of the Five armies' troops from our territories' and that 'our final aim is the complete retreat of these troops, to be effected as quickly as possible'.

Doubtless it was imprudent to insist so much on this aim, since the Moscow Protocol stipulated the contrary. Yet one cannot suspect Dubcek of deliberately wanting to deceive his countrymen; it would seem that he was inspired by an optimism which survived all trials and that he sincerely hoped that everything would come out all right.

When the Czechoslovak Communist Party Central Committee met for the first time after the invasion (at Prague Castle on 31 August) it complied with Article 3 of the Protocol and was to approve the negotiations of the past week in Moscow. The session was partly a review of the Committee's members, with the conservatives passionately defending themselves against accusations of collaboration with the Russians.

It was far from easy to persuade the members that the delegation had no choice but to accept the treaty which had been finally signed in the Soviet capital. This discussion was confidential too, but the author was able to consult the minutes of the proceedings when preparing this book. It transpires from these minutes that the main burden of explications fell to Svoboda who addressed the meeting in the spirit of a self-appointed national hero who by his courage and determination had saved the people from disaster.

In two speeches – the second took the form of an improvised address – he declared :

During this crisis I have been guided by three principles. First of all, I did not at any cost want to see blood flowing again and the corpses of my comrades piling up. I concluded that the situation required a political solution, entailing first of all the restoration of legal power. I thought the other important thing was that the nation should be able to pursue the January policies under the Party's guidance. The Soviet comrades will not intervene in our internal affairs.\* I am informing you, comrades, of what I have done not as President of the Republic, but as a man who held it most important that the Party remain free of blemishes.

I do not consider the results of the Moscow negotiations a triumph – in fact it is not a victory for either party. But I do not believe either that one can talk of capitulation or collaboration. We are being asked for explanations, which may not be understood either by the Party or by the nation. Some people would no doubt prefer to evade these explanations; but I want to warn you against such an attitude for it would have very serious consequences for both our countries. Two tasks await us today : to promote policies that will attract the population's support on the one hand and to fulfil our obligations to Moscow with absolute precision on the other. . . As far as I am concerned, I do not view these negotiations in terms of capitulation or collaboration, but rather as friendly contacts with our Soviet comrades with the aim of finding a solution. If by chance any one of you is hesitating to take the only way out of this situation still open to our country – for fear of being considered a collaborator – I beg him to resign immediately from all the posts he may hold.

\*Needless to say the Soviet comrades intervened before the signatures on the Moscow Protocol had time to dry. For example, Moscow insisted that certain officials be sacked from their posts in the Party and the government. It was Svoboda himself who asked the Minister of the Interior, Pavel, to resign 'for the good of us all'. When there was discussion on the subject of who should succeed Pavel, Brezhnev insisted that it should be his faithful servant Milos Jakes (now head of the influential Party Control Commission). Finally a compromise was reached as in many other cases in the post-August period. Pavel resigned but his successor was an unknown local Party official, Jan Pelnar. This minister without experience worked under the discreet guidance of Pavel himself for several months. Later however he attacked Pavel and even accused him of trying to sabotage the Ministry of the Interior. The manoeuvre did not help : Pelnar was eventually fired.

At this Central Committee session Prime Minister Cernik also tried to persuade the members that there was no other solution for Czechoslovakia but to capitulate. The minutes record him as saying :

The Soviet Union and the socialist countries are our allies – and this must be remembered. They want to weaken imperialism in co-operation with us, this is a common aim. Our situation can only be restored by a reasonable policy. Nobody should be left in doubt that we will strive for the establishment of socialism. We are part of the socialist camp.

Our main concern is the Party and its unity. Only the Party can lead us out of this situation. If the Party is not strengthened, it will fall and with it our nations. In such an event I fear civil war. The division of the world took place at the Yalta conference. Two world structures emerged, and they have both their laws, their political, economic, cultural as well as military goals. There is a socialist structure and there is a capitalist one. Each of these structures has its own centre and it is this centre which determines world policies and also those of the small nations.

Alexander Dubcek delivered a speech testifying to the collapse of his dreams. Twice he broke into tears. Towards the end, however, his optimism once again prevailed :

Our situation just now is very complicated indeed. One may say that it is tragic. Yet our people expect us to do something to solve the situation. The proceedings of the Slovak Party Congress and the Moscow Protocol proved that our peoples are capable of grasping the situation. But we must tell them the truth. . . The question is : is there any possibility of our leading our nations out of this situation? The answer is : there is. Is there a sound relationship between our people and our Party? Yes, there is. So let's get to work.

However, nobody, not even Dubcek and Smrkovsky, had the courage to tell the people the whole truth. Before 'going to work' it was essential to legalize in contractual form Article 5 of the Protocol, concerning the stationing of troops on Czechoslovak territory. No Czechoslovak government, even under Novotny, had ever concluded such an agreement, representing as it did

a drastic limitation of the Republic's sovereignty. No wonder Dubcek and his friends hesitated as to how they would announce this disaster to the people. The latter, however, had little illusion on this score. The weekly *Student* (in its issue of 27 August) appealed to the National Assembly, to the President and to the government :

By ratifying the results of the Moscow negotiations we lose everything. Our freedom, our honour, our conscience. We shall become – as so often before in our history – a nation of slaves, a mass of people without shape. We shall betray not only ourselves but also the historic task of our country, which is to undermine the inhuman structure of Stalinism and give a human face to the socialist order. . . Therefore we request . . . the National Assembly . . . to reject at once any ratification of the results of the Moscow negotiations. The Central Committee of the Party must dissociate itself from the results of these negotiations. The government must reject the Moscow deal at once.

Comrades, above all be Czechs and Slovaks, communists, citizens of this country. Let the occupying forces rather disperse your organizations than sign what would amount to treason.

*Literarni Listy* (28 August) proclaimed on behalf of its entire staff that 'agreements based on any form of occupation of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic are unacceptable to the Czech and Slovak nations. . . Treaties concluded under duress are not binding.' Similarly, innumerable resolutions from factories and organizations poured into Prague, stressing that the Moscow Protocol – 'this act against our nation, imposed under abnormal circumstances' – must not be ratified.\*

\*Referring to this national uproar, Brezhnev told Dubcek in Moscow a month later: 'We were not at all impressed. We know very well how such resolutions are fabricated.'

CHAPTER THREE  
LEGALIZED AGGRESSION

NOT since the Cuban 'missile' crisis in October 1962 had Moscow been faced with such a serious situation as that produced by the invasion of Czechoslovakia. As in the previous case, the consequences were soon seen in the international communist movement, in the socialist bloc and even in Russia itself. On both occasions Moscow committed certain errors in its political and strategic calculations, and in both cases the original methods as well as goals had to be revised.

These modifications, it is true, were the result of improved knowledge and a more accurate evaluation of the situation in the country than that given in Chervonenko's reports. At a September briefing of leading Soviet editors, Politburo member Suslov proposed a modification of the term 'open counter-revolution' then currently used by Soviet information media when referring to the Prague Spring; the term 'creeping counter-revolution' was now to be used. Suslov admitted that some Soviet diplomats orientated Soviet policy 'wrongly' in favour of comrades with 'rather limited possibilities' (probably Indra, Kolder, Svestka) to the detriment of 'politicians with actual perspectives' such as Gustav Husak.

From Moscow's point of view, the dealings of the Central Committee after the invasion were not satisfactory.\* True, the

\*Not a single member of the Central Committee had explicitly approved the invasion. And only old General Rytir (who had fought for Novotny in January to the last moment) criticized Dubcek's policy with some gusto and maintained that 'rightist elements in and outside the Party' were undermining relations with the Soviet Union. The General went as far as to express his doubts that . . . 'the Praesidium, in its present or possibly new composition, would be able to carry out a policy of active friendship with the Soviet Union as desired by Comrade Svoboda.' Rytir's praise for the President was not mere chance. It had always been Moscow's intention to split Svoboda from Dubcek and Smrkovsky and to co-operate exclusively with him, Husak and others more to Moscow's liking. Secondly, Svoboda's two speeches to the Central Committee session after the invasion showed him to be a communist first and President of the Republic and patriot

Moscow negotiations and their disastrous results had been approved, and the Fourteenth Extraordinary Party Congress scheduled for 9 September had been 'provisionally' postponed. On the other hand, the new composition of the highest Party organs clearly strengthened the progressive and centrist forces (eighty of the newly co-opted Central Committee members were delegates elected to the Fourteenth Congress). The Praesidium was augmented from 11 to 21 members; of them only Bilak and Piller could be classified as extreme conservatives. The 'Zionist' Kriegel had to be dropped from this body, but so were three hard-liners – Kolder, Svestka and Rigo. It was obvious that the Soviet intervention had not united but on the contrary had created a deep split in the Central Committee and the entire Party. This fact was to have fatal consequences in months to come.

As for the information media, several moves were made towards mild censorship, mostly self-imposed by the journalists themselves. Early in September, an Office for the Press and Information was established; but the reformist Vohnout was put in charge of it; he resigned some six months later, when full preventive censorship was re-established. In any case, whatever instructions Vohnout issued were interpreted liberally. The weeklies suspended on Soviet orders (*Reporter*, *Listy*) reappeared. A number of new periodicals of liberal tendency quickly became popular. The directors of Czechoslovak radio and television, Josef Hejzlar and Jiri Pelikan, had to be dismissed but diplomatic posts were reserved for them in western Europe. Ota Sik, long the 'black sheep' of the Czechoslovak Party, had to resign (he has since lived in Switzerland) as did Foreign Minister Jiri Hajek. Party secretary Cestmir Cisar was side-tracked to the newly created Czech National Council.\* However, Indra also had to accept a minor post at the secretariat for a while, and Salgovic, who had been missing for quite some time now, was prevented from attending a Central Committee meeting as late

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second. Hardly ten days after the Soviet action, this leader of an invaded and occupied country launched a violent attack against alleged enemies of Moscow and warned against confusing democracy with 'anarchy' and 'anti-socialism'; when considering the advantages of democracy, one must always think twice about who profits from it most and whether it does not 'serve' as a mask for those who reject socialism, Svoboda added.

\*Later he was forced to resign even from this post and was subsequently expelled from the Party.

as November. There were repeated demands that people like Kolder should resign from their posts.

More personnel changes came later; however, the general pattern was that when a progressive was removed, he was usually replaced by another progressive, perhaps one with a less radical reputation than his predecessor. In general, although personnel changes were carried out, the over-all composition of almost every Party and state body at every level remained clearly progressive.

Early in September, Vasilij Kuznetsov, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, arrived in Prague as a kind of Soviet plenipotentiary for Czechoslovakia. Moscow wanted to have an experienced diplomat on the spot who would be able to make good some of Chervonenko's blunders and also faithfully report back to Moscow on the state of the occupied country. Kuznetsov had a number of high-level talks with Czechoslovak leaders with a view to speeding up 'normalization'. His interview with Smrkovsky (on 11 September) is of particular interest. The minutes of this exchange provide an unusual insight into this cat-and-mouse style negotiation. (See Appendix B.)

In the first half of September there was a busy exchange of confidential notes between Prague and Moscow which dealt with a projected treaty to legalize formally the 'temporary' stationing of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia. The Russians seemed in a great hurry to have this point settled as it was for the moment the only real advantage that they could salvage from their expedition of 20 August. At this point however an event occurred which was to influence the position considerably.

On 26 September a Czechoslovak delegation led by Lenart, the Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's Central Committee, arrived in Budapest to take part in the deliberations of the 'Preparatory Commission for the International Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties'. This Commission was meeting at a moment when the international communist movement was in a state of great tension, and the condemnation of the invasion by the majority of communist parties was common knowledge. Moscow, fearing that an even greater split might happen, wanted at all costs to have a Czechoslovak delegation take part in the Budapest preparatory conference. An emissary was quickly sent to Prague for this purpose; not a Soviet this

time but the Hungarian Party Secretary for International Relations, Komoczin. Lenart drew up for Dubcek a detailed account of the conversations he had with his Hungarian counterpart. Komoczin (that is, Moscow) immediately made it clear that his main concern was that the 'Czechoslovak delegation to Budapest should not bring up certain delicate questions as it would not be useful to do so'. Or more precisely the question of the Five's invasion. They in their turn promised 'not to mention the affair during the conference'. Before committing himself on the matter, Lenart asked if Komoczin could be sure that none of the thirty participants at the Budapest conference had the intention of throwing a spanner in the works. 'That is exactly the point,' said Komoczin, 'if someone does raise a burning issue, it will not have to be dwelt on.' Lenart was of the opinion that in these circumstances it might be better if the Czechoslovak delegation did not come to Budapest but just solemnly announced its support for the projected summit-level conference planned for November. Komoczin pointed out that such an attitude might lead people to believe that Moscow was so weak that even 'in the present situation' it could not make Czechoslovakia take part in a consultation of such importance.

However, despite Lenart's discretion and that of his deputy Kaderka in charge of the international section of the Czechoslovak Party's Central Committee, things did not go smoothly in Budapest: the meetings were broken by interruptions in the first five minutes; the Western communist parties were mostly hostile to the idea of a top-level conference in November and voiced bitter criticisms of the Five's intervention in Czechoslovakia.

One evening Lenart received an impromptu visit from Ponomarev and Katushev, the two leading representatives of the Soviet delegation (who have reputations of being 'young Turks' in the Party hierarchy). When they had assured him of their own personal regret at what had happened in August, they gave him their opinion on the matter. According to Ponomarev, those chiefly responsible were the dogmatic and 'semi-fascist' elements in the Soviet Party's Politburo - mainly military men and 'centrists' of the Brezhnev type 'who had kept their district secretary mentality'. The Czechoslovak affair had apparently been severely censored by all the 'sensible' progressives in the Soviet Party leadership but they were unluckily in the minority.



It is true that the military men had suggested an alliance against Brezhnev, but it had been decided that this suggestion was 'dangerous' for more than one reason, mainly because the generals, once in power, would not waste time in making one of their own creatures First Secretary. To conclude, Ponomarev and Katushev stressed that all those who thought as they did wanted a settlement of the Czechoslovak affair to be agreed on as soon as possible, which would include at least partial reparation for the damage caused by the incompetence of Chervonenko and the ambitions of Ulbricht. Although the presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia was a *fait accompli* since the invasion, this did not mean one could not take a long look at the situation and examine all the possible political solutions not yet explored.

Before the conference in Budapest ended, Ponomarev showed Lenart a note he was writing to Brezhnev, putting forward a 'normalization' programme which was to be progressive, moderate and based on the decision to trust Dubcek's team.\* It is not known whether Brezhnev ever received or read this note but on his return Lenart spoke of it to Dubcek, just when the Czechoslovak leaders were preparing to fly to Moscow for the second time. In the circumstances the reported existence of this note from Ponomarev to Brezhnev could only be considered a good omen for the coming negotiations. At all events Dubcek was almost certain of the positive effect the note might have had on Brezhnev and he confided to his close colleagues that 'this time he would not only refuse to give an inch but would also demand apologies for what had been done to him in August.'

The Czechoslovak delegation, made up of Dubcek, Cernik and Husak, arrived in Moscow on 2 October. The talks started immediately, but from the very first meeting (lasting three hours) the Czechoslovak delegates had difficulty in getting a word in to interrupt the torrent of criticisms, recriminations and threats hurled at them by their partners. According to the Soviets, the Moscow Protocol had been 'systematically and deliberately' violated; the press, radio and television continued to do as they wished; no significant changes had been made in

\*A document intended for circulation to all the Soviet Communist Party organizations that autumn was said to have criticized Ponomarev for having 'under-estimated the danger of the counter-revolution in Prague'. (*Le Monde*, 20 August 1969.)

the Party cadres, and there was open talk of a date for an Extraordinary Congress in the near future and the creation of a Czech Communist Party; even if it did not support them systematically, the Party leadership had nevertheless closed its eyes to both overt and 'underhand' anti-Soviet activities; the Central Committee had been enlarged by co-opting certain eminent unknowns who might possibly even be 'western agents'.

Dubcek, taken aback by these accusations, tried to find a way out with ideological explanations; he testified to his unshakeable faith in socialist ideas and pointed to the damage which the invasion had done to the international communist movement. What wasted effort! Their Soviet hosts reminded them cynically that there was no question of an ideological quarrel, that the opinions of the West European Communist Parties (especially those financially dependent on the Soviet Union) were a matter of complete indifference to them and that the 'building of socialism with a human face' according to the Czechoslovak dream could not serve as a model for anyone as there was no possibility that a new 'socialist country' would appear in Europe during the next fifty years.

Brezhnev added that neither Marx nor Lenin (and he knew his classics) claimed anywhere in their works that there could be two models of socialism and that had it not been for the fraternal intervention, the Czechoslovak experiment would only have resulted in the disintegration of the socialist camp and would have caused 'all of us to lose our power'. This was obviously the key to the whole problem. Dubcek's delegation was told that the Soviet troops were in Czechoslovakia to make sure that power remained in the right hands. Nevertheless, if they considered a military presence embarrassing, the Soviet Union would always be ready to accept an equal number of Czechoslovak soldiers for whom place could always be found along the frontier with China. . .

It was a shock. The total failure of the visit could be read on the faces of the Czechoslovak delegates when they arrived back at Ruzyně Airport near Prague at midnight on 4 October: they were all pale, embittered and humiliated. With the cynicism of an old-timer Husak remarked: 'We came, we saw and we lost!'

Despite the late hour, a meeting of the 'faithful' was held in the Central Committee building to discuss what measures would

now have to be taken. Dubcek began to realize that he had perhaps let himself be intimidated too easily; Spacek and Mlynar, both members of the Praesidium, wanted to resign immediately. Smrkovsky too was hesitant but did not really waver and kept the pact he had made with Dubcek, Svoboda and Cernik (Vasil Bilak was to criticize this pact at the November 1968 Central Committee plenum), to resign all together if necessary.

Some members reproached the First Secretary for not using the alternative plan worked out before the second visit to Moscow. This plan remains a secret, but its main aim was to attempt to steal a march on the Soviets by proposing a treaty providing for a staged withdrawal of the troops; ninety per cent immediately and the rest (the Soviet contingents) over the space of two or three years – a time limit which could be lengthened by bilateral agreement if the Soviets resisted strongly. This plan was to have confronted the Soviet Union with a *fait accompli*, once approved by the Party, the Government and the Assembly.

In spite of the risks it involved – mainly losing some of the popular support for the Dubcek team – this plan had been seriously studied by several parliamentary committees just before the second meeting in Moscow and was still on Dubcek's desk with the note 'to be examined with a view to being adopted'. However, the First Secretary, 'courageous but not brave', had not decided to adopt it.

Dubcek, against his own long-term interests, avoided the burning issue of the ratification of the Moscow deal. In a major speech (on 11 October) Dubcek stressed the less humiliating parts of the agreement, and insisted that the 'post-January policy' would be continued. This key sentence was to be heard repeatedly throughout the second half of the Dubcek era after the invasion.

On 14 October, Prime Minister Cernik unobtrusively left for Moscow to negotiate there what was cryptically announced as 'certain questions connected with the Moscow agreement'. Otherwise, there was silence. And even after Cernik's return to Prague on 16 October, not a word was said about what was to happen in a few hours: at three in the afternoon, Prime Minister Kosygin landed in Prague, accompanied by Foreign Minister

Gromyko, his First Deputy, Kuznetsov and Defence Minister, Marshal Grechko. Soon afterwards, the distinguished Soviet delegation was received by President Svoboda at Prague Castle. At six in the evening at the Czernin Palace, the offices of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a 'Treaty relating to the temporary stationing of Soviet troops on the territory of Czechoslovakia' was signed.\* The scene was televised live, showing the tense faces of the Czechoslovak leaders – a scene of humiliation befitting a defeated country.

Yet some of the leaders, notably Cernik, spoke as if the Treaty were the result of negotiations between equals and not an act of capitulation. Cernik declared that on the basis of the Treaty, the 'troops of the socialist countries still on Czechoslovak territory will leave shortly with the exception of the Soviet contingents in numbers previously agreed upon. . .'. Kosygin corrected him indirectly: '... The main Soviet forces will leave Czechoslovakia in the next few months in stages. In accepting this solution, the socialist countries believe that the process of normalization just begun in Czechoslovakia, will continue, and that the Czechoslovak people will not allow anti-socialist forces to stop this process.'† In other words, it was up to Moscow to decide whether or not 'normalization' was proceeding satisfactorily; such a conclusion might be reached either in the near future or never.

Kosygin in Prague and the other leaders back in Moscow could now be satisfied. The Treaty gave the Soviets the power and right to intervene in Czechoslovak internal affairs from a position of strength. Both the strategic and political aims of the Soviet Union had been fulfilled. In addition, the Treaty imposed no time limit – a unique aspect. The parts of the text published did not reveal the strength of the stationed troops but one can safely assume that this was left to the discretion of Soviet generals. Similarly, the unpublished parts of the Treaty (or subsequent agreements) again secured positions for Soviet agents

\*For text see TASS release, 18 October 1968.

†Kosygin added that 'the defence of the achievements of socialism in Czechoslovakia . . . is a sacred internationalist duty. . . The temporary stay of Soviet troops [is intended] to create solid guarantees for Czechoslovakia's security and its socialist gains [and] to safeguard the interests of the entire socialist community from encroachments by the forces of imperialism and reaction.'

in the two key Czechoslovak ministries, those of the Interior and of Defence.

After this depressing event, strangely reminiscent of the Munich agreement,\* Cernik had to obtain the ratification of the Treaty by a majority of Parliament as swiftly as possible. The plenary session of the National Assembly was hastily called for 18 October. Under various pretexts, the appropriate Parliamentary Committees (constitutional, defence, security and foreign political) were not given the possibility to peruse the text of the Treaty till late morning before the opening of the plenary session. The members of these committees hardly had the time to read, let alone study, the text. They protested, recriminated – at least some of the more courageous did. To no avail, of course. At three in the afternoon, the Treaty had to be ratified by Parliament in a decorous manner.

A few days earlier, Cernik, Husak and several other officials of the Central Committee's Secretariat agreed upon a way of presenting the affair to the people. They were in favour of shock treatment: let the people swallow the bitter pill in one dose. They decided to transmit the ratification proceedings live on television and radio, to give the act the lustre of a top state affair with the President of the Republic present, portraying the Treaty in the best possible light for Prague – then the subject would be dropped altogether. The sooner forgotten the better.

The Treaty was presented in Parliament by Prime Minister Cernik who linked a massive vote in favour of the Treaty with a vote of confidence in his government. Cernik's declaration was carefully drafted and redrafted; the final version was a masterpiece of deceit. Cernik's main argument was that the Treaty 'does not solve the causes but the consequences of a new situation'. He repeatedly stressed that Czechoslovakia had no other choice but to accept the 'new situation'. He posed as a Czechoslovak patriot shattered by the August events which

\*A comparison of the October 1968 Treaty with the Munich agreement of thirty years earlier offers insight into persisting great-power interests in what Bismarck called the bastion of Europe. Czechoslovak Communists have been denouncing the Munich agreement for decades as a shameful act of capitalist appeasement. They argued that in the autumn of 1938 the Benes government betrayed the people by capitulating in the face of superior aggressive forces.

'introduced into our relations a lot of suffering, bitterness, tension and even misunderstanding'. Finally, he pretended that the Treaty provided additional safeguards against the dangers of imperialism and German revanchism.

When it came to the vote, more than twenty per cent of the deputies were not present. Out of 350, 242 attended. Ten deputies abstained and four voted against ratification – among them Frantisek Kriegel and Madame Truda Sekaninova-Cakrtova. The latter, a communist of long standing whose first husband was executed by the Germans during the war, delivered a courageous speech which was never published or broadcast by the Czechoslovak information media. Basically, Mrs Sekaninova proposed that the National Assembly should request the government to reopen negotiations with the Soviet Union on the final retreat of Soviet troops from Czechoslovak territory. Cernik parried this proposition by a counter-proposal to the effect that the Czechoslovak government should not take such an obligation upon itself at this particular moment. Cernik's proposal was carried by 233 votes to 4 and 5 abstentions.

Thus the curtain came down on this act of the drama, described on 21 August 1968 by a Czechoslovak Government communiqué as 'an act of aggression perpetrated for the first time in the international communist movement by the allied armies of the socialist countries against a state governed by a communist party'.

The history of the first nine months of the Czechoslovak-Soviet crisis may be briefly summarized as follows :

1. In the period immediately preceding Novotny's fall, and for several weeks after the event, Moscow failed to evaluate properly both its importance and potential repercussions; for a while it persuaded itself that 'cadre changes', most probably in any case inevitable, had occurred at the top of this centralized, friendly, loyal communist party.
2. Moscow failed to understand the social and political pressures which developed so dramatically in Czechoslovakia, and could not grasp the origins, nature or historical framework of this movement. Soon, however, it recognized elements in this development which it considered dangerous to the interests of the Soviet

super-power. The liberalizing trend of the Dubcek Party leadership was labelled by the neo-Stalinist Soviet leaders and their dogmatic allies, such as Ulbricht or Gomulka, as anti-socialist, counter-revolutionary and therefore anti-Soviet. These former revolutionaries were taken aback and horrified by the unity of purpose shown by the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the whole nation. The crude pressures exerted by Moscow served only to reinforce this unity. The total participation of the labouring masses ('working class') in the Dubcek experiment bewildered them; since it could not be explained it must be refuted.

3. At the time when the Five sent their letter from Warsaw in July, the Soviet leadership was already convinced that developments *inside* Czechoslovakia were not only destroying the neo-Stalinist system there but also the entire political, ideological, military and economic structure of a key socialist country in the heart of Europe, which had up till then been a model of satellite stability.

4. Moscow attempted to stop this development by various Party procedures which included admonitions, threats and promises. The history of the crisis gives ample evidence that both sides, to the very last moment, desired a political compromise. Indeed, such a compromise seemed to have been reached at Cierna and Bratislava. For reasons to be discussed in the final part of this book, the Soviet Politburo suddenly decided to resort to an extreme measure which they had been preparing for a long time, i.e. a military invasion of the country.

5. There were a number of 'vicious circles' around which the crisis evolved. The most important one was created by the two opposing, irresistible pressures weighing down the Dubcek leadership: the people requested full-scale reforms of the system, with constitutional and other guarantees which would make a reversal impossible. Moscow demanded exactly the opposite: that they curb and finally annul these reforms and re-establish a neo-Stalinist system. The harder the pressure exerted by the people, the stronger Moscow's demands grew.

6. Squeezed between these two antagonistic forces, the new Czechoslovak Party leadership, itself taken by surprise by these developments, began to show increasing signs of hesitation, timidity, indecision, lack of experience and, finally, of disunity. In any case, it could not step outside its own character. It had as

leader a sentimental Marxist, a well-meaning, kind reformist who was himself an inexperienced if sometimes reasonably cunning *apparatchik*. He too was a hesitant, undecided man. He believed that in a free-for-all discussion truth would prevail, and that Marxism-Leninism was the truth. Up to a point, this was a romantic Slovak variation of Mao-Tse Tung's 'hundred flowers' theory. Moscow exploited all these weaknesses to its own advantage.

7. Early on in the Spring, the dogmatic forces in the Party, still undefeated, attempted to influence developments. Through the Soviet Ambassador in Prague and the Soviet agents, still numerous although their positions had been undermined, Moscow was informed that the 'healthy forces' in the Party were strong, that Dubcek was a 'man of two faces', and that he enjoyed but limited support in the country. Thus, it was the moment to strike. The Soviet Party Politburo, a body with little taste for risks, hesitated too. Instead of striking, Moscow threatened to do so. Troop movements and manoeuvres became an important instrument of Soviet pressure throughout almost the entire crisis up to the Bratislava conference. At the time of the Warsaw meeting, in mid-July, the important conclusion reached could no longer be doubted: Stalin's post-war imperium was endangered by the possibility of Czechoslovak desertion. It was imperative to discover, isolate and destroy the Prague Spring virus.

8. From Moscow's point of view, this virus and the epidemic it threatened to spread were totally unexpected: this had occurred in a country which had always viewed the Soviet Union and the Soviet Party as a friend and ally. Soviet-Czechoslovak friendship had been traditional in more than one sense. Between Prague and Moscow there had never been discord leading to enmity or war. Anti-Russian sentiment, so widespread in countries like Poland or Rumania, was practically non-existent among Czechs and Slovaks.

9. Throughout the crisis – and even at its climax on 21 August 1968 – the Czechoslovak Communist Party and government never proclaimed the country neutral, nor denounced the Warsaw Pact, nor left (or intended to leave) COMECON. In the United Nations after the invasion, the Czechoslovak delegates explained Czechoslovakia's position and repeatedly stressed the country's



faithfulness to the socialist camp. The decision to invade the country was made on the grounds of the potential or actual danger which the Czechoslovak reform movement presented to the Soviet Union and the socialist camp. This invasion proved to be a military success but a monumental political blunder.

10. Moscow had to pay a price for her gains. However, by the end of 1968, 'Operation Czechoslovakia' could be seen as a net gain for Moscow: the virus had been killed and with it the Prague Spring; the danger of contamination had been arrested; a tough lesson had been given to those who might have liked to follow the Dubcek heresy; an important country was firmly reinstated in the socialist camp; the 'socialist commonwealth', proudly led by the Soviet Union, had been reinforced; the excitement and even indignation of a number of communist parties had been successfully dispelled. It only remained to re-Stalinize Czechoslovakia. This process was to become known as 'normalization'.

### III The Last Battle of Alexander Dubcek

#### CHAPTER ONE

#### INTRODUCING ORDER INTO CHAOS

It would be tragic if the Party and the state authorities were to regain the confidence of our allies in such a way as to lose the confidence of their own people.

*Politika*, Prague, 31 October 1968  
(shortly before its suspension).

ON 11 October 1968 Radio Moscow carried an extensive report on a meeting of 'old' Czechoslovak communists which had taken place in the Prague suburb of Liben. The gathering adopted a favourable attitude towards the Soviet occupation forces and criticized top Czechoslovak Party bodies for 'ideological softness, weakness and incompetence' in their activities since January 1968. The assembly dispatched a letter to the Minister of Culture demanding that the Moscow agreements be implemented in his sphere of responsibility and the information media put at the service of 'socialism'. Another letter sent to the Public Prosecutor demanded the punishment of journalists who had 'incited provocative acts' during the invasion. The group declared in a resolution that the intervention of allied forces had been timely, since it precluded the emergence of a 'white terror'. It did not recognize the current composition of the Party Central Committee. The gathering asked for a full rehabilitation of communists who had been accused of collaboration with the occupying forces and demanded court proceedings against 'petty bourgeois adventurists'.

A little earlier, a Czech newspaperman, paraphrasing Churchill, wrote: 'All that can be promised is tears, sweat and drudgery. . . The unity cherished by us and praised by others is,

unfortunately, not a lasting characteristic of human society. As soon as we begin to accommodate ourselves, we shall again find in our family people who are quarrelsome, egoistic, frightened, despondent, envious and apathetic. . . It is easy to write a sentence about unity in an editorial, to declare it from the platform, to recite it in a poem or declaim it in a play, but people remain what they are. . .'\*

A people cannot live in a constant state of emergency. Yet the Czechs have shown a stubborn will to resist and persist, in a situation which bordered on the hopeless. The Dubcek leadership made great efforts after the invasion to satisfy the Soviets while trying not to compromise itself in the eyes of the population. Czechoslovak leaders incessantly pleaded for understanding, unity and co-operation. Frequent warnings were issued against what were then called 'extremist forces'. However, there were no political arrests and even demonstrations were handled with restraint. Dubcek and his friends tried to convince people that they would not allow a deterioration of the situation nor permit a return to the Novotny era. They insisted that there was still room for the continuation of the reforms. Plans for a federalized state comprising a Czech and a Slovak socialist republic continued to be worked out according to schedule. The rehabilitation of those persecuted in the past progressed slowly but without interruption.

Despite the efforts of the Party leadership to observe the Moscow Protocol the Soviets constantly pressed for stricter implementation and a more orthodox interpretation of it. As foreseen, Moscow resolved to offset sooner or later the humiliating political defeat it had suffered. Its best means of achieving this was, of course, to call on its faithful domestic collaborators whose political life had been saved by Article 7 of the Protocol. Although they laboured under the stigma of being labelled as traitors, they exerted constant and growing pressure in the Party. Their sole aim coincided with that of the centrists in the leadership - to break up the 'Spring coalition of the Big Four' by eliminating Smrkovsky and several other progressives. Then to proceed with the elimination of Dubcek and the destruction of his reform programme. This meant, of course, that they themselves would take over all the power in the country, shielded in

\**Reporter*, 26 September-2 October 1968

this ascension by the less compromised 'realists' – Husak, Strougal, possibly Bilak.

The conservatives had been assisted in their efforts ever since the invasion by direct and indirect Soviet pressures, of various kinds – diplomatic, military, economic and also psychological. Several pages could be devoted to the comings and goings between Moscow and Prague, whether of Soviet diplomats and Soviet generals, of delegations from the Five countries, accompanied by demonstrative troop movements, and sudden trips of top Czechoslovak leaders to Moscow, Kiev and the capitals of the friendly countries whose armies took part in the invasion. Soviet generals travelled around Czechoslovakia as if it were a Soviet province, the families of Soviet soldiers stationed in the country moved freely across the border (appropriate Articles of the Forces Treaty of October entitled them to enter and leave the country without custom and other controls), emptying the already half-bare Czech shops with their indiscriminate buying. Moscow, with her customary lack of finesse, insisted on the exchange of cultural delegations and on performances by Czech musical and theatrical groups in Moscow and the other Warsaw Pact capitals. Czechoslovak writers and artists resisted these demands, either by simply rejecting such exchanges or taking refuge in various Schweik-like excuses.

Soviet 'occupation diplomacy' was well served first by Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov and then by Soviet Party Secretary Konstantin Katushev. The latter was dispatched to Prague at the end of 1968, and again early in April during the final crisis that culminated in Dubcek's fall. Both Kuznetsov and Katushev followed the same line: they paid visits to top Party and government leaders, stressing Soviet arguments in favour of speedy 'normalization', and later voicing discontent at the fact that the process was restricted and slow. At the same time, these emissaries and Soviet generals paid visits described as friendly and comradely to the hardcore conservatives, even if the latter's actual functions in the Party were minor. These visits were meant as public encouragement to these men who were despised by the people and distrusted in the Party, a sign of Moscow's confidence in them. Soviet generals, in their turn, negotiated directly with pro-Moscow officers who held no major posts. At times of crisis,

as in January or in April 1969, Soviet emissaries delivered ultimatum-like demands to Dubcek, Cernik and Svoboda, bringing to their notice (and that of the public at large) in the crudest and rudest terms who was true master of the country. These comings and goings, visits and intrusions, had a deep effect on the population; the more so since very little had been said publicly about these moves except that they were taking place and that 'questions of interest to both sides' were under discussion. All of this was of immense help to the domestic hardliners who could not have hoped for a takeover without this consistent Soviet support.

In addition to the encouragement they received from Moscow, the hardliners – who had been trying for months to get control of the Party press or even to find a way into the other information media – could count on three ways of getting their point of view across: the station Radio-Vltava and the weekly *Zpravy* published in tabloid format under the control of the occupation forces.\* At the beginning of January 1969 *Tribuna* began appearing, a new weekly edited by Oldrich Svestka, a former member of the Praesidium and former editor-in-chief of the main Party paper *Rude pravo*. He joined the conspirators' side after the invasion and has since then adopted an extremely pro-Soviet attitude.

The struggle in the Party itself grew apace and the split widened. Some of the more frightened and opportunist of the reformist leaders began to retrace their steps. Cestmir Cisar, once the idol of university students, declared on 4 October that the time was approaching when it would be necessary to re-evaluate post-January developments and draw pertinent conclusions about its positive as well as negative aspects. This, he suggested, should be done regardless of the dangers to any person's prestige. Such statements amounted to supporting the plan of the hardliners directly, and were full of ominous implications. It became fashionable in the weeks following the invasion to criticize what were called 'the two extremes' – the over-zealous reformists and

\*Since October 1968, *Tydenik aktualit*, another Soviet publication in Czech, appeared every week, released by the Soviet press agency Novosti. Unlike *Zpravy*, its distribution in Czechoslovakia was legal and still is at the present moment. It deals mainly with life in Soviet Russia and the affairs of the 'socialist camp'.

the over-'conservative' conservatives. The latter, however, were little inclined to play fair. They created splinter groups and sought refuge in such organizations as the Society of Soviet-Czechoslovak Friendship, or in local Party organizations known for their pro-Soviet leanings. The fanatics among them were dispatched (on 7 November) to a wreath-laying ceremony at a Prague cemetery to boo Dubcek, to shout and raise threatening fists. This was a foretaste of things to come.

In the meantime hectic preparations were made for Czechoslovakia's federalization. Dubcek was eager to realize this particular part of his Action Programme which, without a doubt, was approved and desired by all the Slovaks and not specifically opposed by the Soviets. In Slovakia, Slovak Party leader Gustav Husak and his friends were all pressing for speedy federalization; it would increase their power considerably and their influence in Prague would rise accordingly. However, this interest in Slovak autonomy seemed to have overshadowed everything else. The questions of liberalization, of effective counterpressure against the joint forces of the Soviets and their domestic collaborators, were neglected in Slovakia. As some Slovak writers noted, this was a dangerous state of affairs: Slovakia would become independent in the framework of a totally dependent state with a regressive, neo-Stalinist leadership.

There were other, procedural, troubles with federalization. It was admitted that the time allotted for putting such a vast project into practice was far too short. The original plan envisaged a consistent federalization on state-executive and legislative, as well as on Party lines. There were many difficulties. For example, there was the question of what responsibilities should be shared by various ministries, and what should be the separate responsibilities of the respective Czech and Slovak offices? As far as legislative bodies were concerned, the Slovaks clearly favoured a dualistic arrangement so that every future bill would have to be approved by the Federal Parliament (elected according to the principle 'one man - one vote'), and a Chamber of Nationalities (in which Slovakia would have a fifty per cent representation). Such a set-up would come very near to giving the smaller partner, Slovakia, an effective right of veto on any all-state legislative action.

The Soviets also played havoc with the original federalization

plans. While in the early stages of the Prague Spring they had seemed ready to go along with a measure of Slovak autonomy, after the invasion they insisted increasingly on the principle of 'democratic centralism', i.e. on the well-known 'pyramid of power'. Furthermore, Moscow, as seen already, was resolutely opposed to the convocation of a constituent congress of the Czech Communist Party (a logical counterpart to the Slovak Party in any federalization along Party lines), fearing that such a congress would end in an overwhelming victory for the progressives.

In spite of these and other difficulties, on 28 October, the fiftieth anniversary of the Czechoslovak Republic, the National Assembly approved a constitutional Bill transforming the hitherto unitary state into a federation of two national republics. The Bill was approved by the 213 deputies attending the session. Of those absent, 17 were excused for illness, while no reasons were given to explain the absence of the remaining 70 deputies. Two days later, Bratislava, the Slovak capital, witnessed a festive ceremony at the signing of the Bill. At midnight, 1 January 1969, the Slovak Socialist Republic came into being as President Svoboda put his signature to the document.

While these activities held public attention for a while, complicated preparations were under way for the Central Committee plenary session which had been called for 15 November. The government (at its session of 25 October) very discreetly decided that the organization of enterprise councils – one of the most far-reaching of Dubcek's anticipated reforms – should not be continued. Thus the Sik proposal that provided for independent enterprise councils (the majority of its members were to be elected directly by workers) was finally condemned. At the time economic councils were operating in about 70 enterprises (about ten per cent of the total), while in 267 other enterprises preparations for the creation of such councils were at an advanced stage. This Yugoslav-inspired 'deviation' was thus also nipped in the bud for in Soviet and hardliners' eyes any attempt at management from below, whether political or trade-unionist, has always seemed suspicious and presented a potential threat to 'democratic centralism'.

Early in November, the situation of the Party and the country was once again precarious. Moscow gave signs of being deeply

discontented with the slow pace of 'normalization'; whilst the people, especially in Bohemia and Moravia, were dissatisfied with Dubcek's middle-of-the-road policy. In October alone, over 2,000 resolutions were received at Prague Party headquarters, many of them demanding stiffer resistance to the occupying power by the Party leadership. On 7 November, the anniversary of the Russian revolution, Soviet flags were burned and Soviet tanks were once again made ready for action.

Also early in November, the Soviet, Polish and East German press resumed attacks against Czechoslovakia, clearly in an effort to support the conservatives in the country. *Krasnaya zvezda* (1 November) charged Czechoslovak newspapers with spreading lies by denying that there had been a danger of counter-revolution during the Prague Spring. Ulbricht's *Neues Deutschland* (3 November) accused the Czechoslovak news media of continuously broadcasting 'anti-socialist, anti-Soviet and anti-Marxist views'. The parties of other socialist countries were also annoyed by the Union of Czechoslovak Journalists' weekly *Reporter* which published (in its issue of 30 October-6 November) analytical studies of the Soviet 'White Book', pointing out the crude falsification of facts by Soviet journalists.

At this particular moment, the conservatives received a welcome boost from Gustav Husak who was to take over from Dubcek six months later. The ambitious Slovak Party chief delivered a major speech in Bratislava on the eve of the plenum to a Slovak *aktiv* of the People's Militia which he himself headed. Husak referred to 'deformations of Marxism and Leninism' during the Prague Spring when, he said, 'anti-socialist liberalist and anarchist forces' became very active. He declared that a revival of 'anti-socialist activities' would not be tolerated. He added that the aims of these forces were 'anti-socialist' in spite of the fact that they professed their allegiance to Dubcek or Svoboda.

The conservative members of the Central Committee met several times in private to co-ordinate their plan of attack for the 14 November session. Their position was far from hopeless: they enjoyed the active support of the Soviet Party leadership, they had preserved and even strengthened their positions in the Party *apparatus*, and they constituted a powerful group which could point an accusing finger in the direction of the present



leadership, if nothing else. Even more important, their opponents had shown clear signs of disunity: the centrists among them – Husak, Cernik and also President Svoboda – were obviously willing to water down the post-January reforms. Consequently, the dogmatists' plan was to attack the outspoken reformists such as Smrkovsky, Kriegel or Spacek, and isolate them from the centrists and from Dubcek (he was to come under fire later). The November plenum was to be a show-down between dogmatists and their more or less outspoken opponents.

The session opened at Prague Castle under the chairmanship of Husak. Dubcek's partisans had prepared a draft resolution which was essentially centrist by nature. They decided to let the conservatives speak on the opening day and counter-attack them later. The first round was opened by Drahomir Kolder who repeated most of the well-known Soviet arguments. It all boiled down to an accusation that the Dubcek leadership was weak and undecided. Similarly, Central Committee members Novy, Piller, Bilak and others criticized the Party leadership's alleged mistakes. The term 'anti-socialist forces' (instead of 'extremist forces') seemed to have been accepted by both sides as an identification of the 'enemy'.

This was not the only point scored by the conservatives. At a private night session of the quartet, Dubcek-Svoboda-Cernik-Husak, the First Secretary found himself practically isolated. Husak persisted in his view expressed in Bratislava that inimical forces were once again 'raising their head' and that the conservatives would prevail unless immediate steps were taken to stop the 'danger on the right'. Dubcek wanted to fight it out in the Central Committee. He thought that every Central Committee member should state clearly where he stood, and that a vote of confidence in the Dubcek policy as such should be taken.\* The other three rejected the idea, pleading once again for a middle-of-the-road attitude, which would include warnings both to the Right and to the Left. At this night meeting, they debated for the first time the idea of making a short trip to Warsaw to see the Soviet Party Secretary Brezhnev, who was currently attending the Polish Party congress. The four came to the

\*The system of vote by acclamation was reintroduced at the November Central Committee session. Partisans of the secret ballot lost by a few votes – 69 against 72.

conclusion that it would be useful to know the Soviets' disposition towards the Czech leadership. Should it be favourable, the leadership's position in the Central Committee would be greatly strengthened. In addition, if Brezhnev were to approve the draft resolution, the conservatives in the Central Committee would have no choice but to accept it in its current form.

And so on the night of 15–16 November, Dubcek, Cernik and Husak slipped out of Prague and flew to Warsaw where they were immediately received by Brezhnev. The following is the key paragraph from the minutes of that night's secret session :

From the very start it was clear that comrade Brezhnev was in a conciliatory mood. He repeatedly declared that the Politburo of the Soviet Party and he personally had full confidence in the Czechoslovak Party leadership. He wanted to stress, however, that the struggle against anti-socialist forces in Czechoslovakia should be stepped up. Comrades Husak and Cernik said that special attention would be paid to this struggle, as witnessed by the proposal of a resolution to be adopted by the Central Committee. Comrade Brezhnev did not read this draft resolution too carefully. He remarked that he knew the contents from other sources, and was satisfied with it.

The three returned from Warsaw at four in the morning, 16 November, tired but happy. However humiliating it might have been to accept the fact that a resolution to be passed by the Central Committee of a Communist Party had to be first approved by the First Secretary of another Party, there was hardly any doubt left that the conservatives had lost the round. Although it was only much later that Dubcek publicly admitted to the night consultation in Warsaw, the news leaked out almost at once to a number of Central Committee members. When the plenum was reopened, at nine in the morning of the same day, practically everybody knew that Brezhnev approved the resolution, and so threw their weight behind the four.

However, this was a Pyrrhic victory in more ways than one. True, the four leaders who had been through the Moscow ordeal in August – Dubcek, Svoboda, Smrkovsky and Cernik – had saved their positions and remained at the helm. But the price they had to pay almost immediately was not only to state but also to prove in action that they would do away energetically both with the spirit and the meagre achievements of the Prague Spring. What actually happened at this Central

Committee session was that Dubcek was forced into a centrist position with distinctly conservative undertones, thus joining Husak and, to a lesser extent, Svoboda and Cernik, and this resulted in the elimination of Smrkovsky as a front-line political personality. Speeches delivered by Husak, Cernik, Svoboda and finally Dubcek himself at the close of the plenum bore witness to this shift. The good First Secretary had once again taken the line of least resistance which was naturally against his own supporters. Dubcek declared that in the Party itself there were 'extremes' which were bound to weaken the 'leading role of the Party' and which 'confused development of socialist democracy with a kind of liberalism without limits'. What was worse, he admitted that the existence of the anti-communist and anti-Soviet forces constituted 'the main danger for the development of socialism in our country'. He criticized the performance of the press, radio and television sharply, and noted that some members of the Praesidium had been accused of lack of patriotism in August, and that such 'emotions' would have to cease. He declared that the stationing of Soviet troops on Czechoslovak territory, and the Treaty ratifying it, were 'an important step in the re-establishment of co-operation and the strengthening of mutual relations' between the Czechoslovak Republic and the Soviet Union. 'Proletarian internationalism' (in this connection, Soviet hegemony in the socialist camp) was an important aspect of policy, binding everybody.

The final resolution, passed by the Central Committee, could hardly have displeased Brezhnev or the domestic quislings. It has since become the Magna Carta of the dogmatic and pro-Soviet elements in the Czechoslovak Communist Party and five months later it served as a springboard for the final and decisive attack on Alexander Dubcek.\*

A few days after the publication of the resolution, the Praesidium (which, significantly enough, was enlarged by such

\*The Central Committee review *Zivot strany* commented after Dubcek's fall: 'The Central Committee November plenum pointed to a way out of the social and Party crisis in its resolution. However, this great opportunity was lost. The leadership was divided, disunited, and this fact had an unfortunate impact on the entire Party and on society as a whole. By its hesitations, this leadership enabled the rightist opportunist forces to continue practically unhindered in their activity, thus undermining the Party further'. (4 June 1969.)

'healthy forces' as Bilak, Piller and Strougal) announced that 'the danger of adventurism' was growing steadily. In Slovakia, Husak launched another attack, this time condemning 'rightist opportunist tendencies and groups within the Party' which, he said, were threatening the very existence of the state. The dogmatists referred incessantly to the November resolution and complained that this was a guide to solving the crisis but that the Dubcek leadership refused to follow it.

The leadership again tried to gain time, to compromise and to concoct little plans of its own on the quiet. Towards the end of 1968, the most authoritative plan to emerge was the so-called 'strategic plan', which Cernik explained to a group of trusted comrades as follows:

The Party leadership – Dubcek, Svoboda, Smrkovsky, Cernik – cannot wage an open struggle with the dogmatists since the latter enjoy Moscow's support: to cross swords with them would amount to fighting the Soviets – an impossible proposition. On the other hand, the leadership must, at least from time to time, criticize the radical reformists publicly, especially those working in the information media. The leadership is forced by objective circumstances to act in this fashion [i.e. under the pressure of the Soviets and their local supporters]. It has to be admitted that the extreme reformists present the leadership with exaggerated, often impossible demands. In this manner, they are unwittingly pushing the leadership – which may be called centrist or, perhaps, simply realistic – into a tight corner; for there is no doubt that these demands are popular with the people. For example if the demand is made that Soviet troops should leave Czechoslovak territory, it becomes a popular slogan but it cannot be fulfilled; by having to resist such demands, the realists in the Party leadership are pushed nearer to dogmatic positions.

Some journalists had asked that the leadership name publicly all those it called opportunist or anti-socialist. But a step in this direction would make police repression almost inevitable – something the present leadership will never comply with as long as it remains in power. The unfortunate result of this [Cernik continued] has been that the Dubcek Party leadership was pushed from crisis to crisis; it appeared in a role of firemen driving from one disaster to another, and neglecting the two basic strategic goals, 'which are the goals of all of us' and which might be attained in the current political situation.

The first goal was to bring about a reduction of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia to a 'token force'. Such a reduction could be accepted by the other side, and could be arranged through direct negotiations in the near future if 'normalization' progressed satisfactorily.

As for the second goal, in order to achieve it there would have to be elections to the National Assembly, the National committees and, finally, a full Party congress. Should there be a consolidation at home, which would pacify the Soviets, there is no reason why the elections and the Congress could not take place relatively soon, for example, in the first half of 1969. In these elections the extreme dogmatist forces would be routed. This decisive defeat would be achieved without a conflict with Moscow which in the circumstances prevailing and with the methods employed by the extremist reformists would otherwise be unavoidable.

[Cernik's conclusion]: A decisive defeat for the dogmatists by way of legal elections to top state and Party organizations would make possible the building of democratic socialism in our country - this construction of democratic socialism is the second aim of this plan.

The naivety of this scheme is so striking as to create doubts that it could have been taken seriously by anybody. It was yet another proof of the centrists' fatal plan of neutralizing and silencing the reformists, especially the most lucid among them, while at the same time appeasing and even promoting the conservatives. Naturally, given these circumstances, the hardliners consolidated their positions for the final blow. The process was a one-way movement; step by step the dogmatic and ultra-conservative forces in the Party squeezed the men of the Prague Spring out. In the security and armed forces, Soviet agents and the KGB took over gradually. Indra, Bilak, Piller and Strougal, discreetly supported by Moscow, were preparing ground for the 'normalization' and re-Stalinization of the country. In Bratislava, Husak waited patiently, but not idly, for his chance.

The work of 'normalization' progressed steadily. Once again, the ambiguous parts of Dubcek's programme and his political stand proved self-defeating and contributed in no small degree to the final fall of the reformist leaders. By resorting to dogmatic language Alexander Dubcek inadvertently played his opponents' game. And once again, there was a tragic logic in the process; what the men of the Prague Spring (as Marxists) had

admitted, soon after the invasion to have been 'misunderstandings', 'an under-estimation of the situation', 'underrating the strength of non-socialist forces', 'negligence of the consequences of internal reforms in international relations' – all these notions were gradually but inevitably transformed into 'anti-socialism', 'rightist opportunist deviation', and finally into 'counter-revolution' and treason.\*

This process took eight months. It was a tortuous, humiliating period, a long path full of compromises and retreats which did not save anything – rather the contrary. At the end of it the first victims of these compromises could be found in the morgue of the Spring Prague: General Prchlik, General Pavel, Kriegel, the bold weeklies *Kulturny zivot*, *Politika*, to be followed by other men: Sik, Spacek, Vodslon, Vaculik, Zatopek, Goldstücker, Pachmann, the progressive publications *Reporter*, *Listy*, *Zitrek*, Smrkovsky and Alexander Dubcek. A growing number fell victim to this useless and hopeless attempt at 'normalization' which was really nothing but a gradual betrayal of the Dubcek ideals. These, too, were there lying alongside their creators who had been unwilling to resign in time. In time – that had been, in the opinion of many, immediately after the return from Moscow on 30 August, or prior to the ratification of the Treaty providing for the 'temporary' stationing of Soviet troops or, at the latest, after the November (1968) or January (1969) Central Committee plena. After August, Dubcek's hopes, all his optimism, were little more than coloured soap bubbles. More realistic was the anonymous comrade who addressed Dubcek and his friends in the following manner:

We declare openly before all the Czechoslovak people that the anti-Party and anti-socialist right-wing has no chance of victory. . . Polarization in our country is advancing irresistibly. Nobody should count on the possibility that when the day will come he will survive

\*The history of the Two Thousand Words is instructive in this respect. This famous petition was signed in June 1968, by eminent Czech and Slovak communists and many in the Party leadership sympathized with it. But these officials were scared by Moscow's violent reaction and declared that the appeal had been issued with good intentions but that objectively it 'threatened the process of democratization'. After the invasion, the petition was described successively as anti-party, anti-socialist, right opportunist, anti-Soviet and finally counter-revolutionary.

undetected somewhere in the middle . . . the rightists have committed crimes against the Party and against the Republic, joined forces with anti-socialist elements at home and abroad. This fact cannot be indefinitely covered up before the Party and our entire people.\*

After the November crisis had been overcome, another was to explode in January. Dubcek himself described it as the most serious since the invasion. At an emergency session of the Executive Committee of the Party's Praesidium,† the prevailing atmosphere was one of utter exasperation, not unlike that on the night of 20–21 August. Several Praesidium members considered a second Soviet armed intervention almost certain; others spoke publicly about a 'tragic culmination of unfortunate developments' and about the possibility of 'immeasurable consequences'. The events leading to the crisis were briefly the following.

Acting on information from Soviet officials and dogmatic Party officials in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Politburo invited a delegation of Czechoslovak Party leaders, the composition of which – Dubcek, Svoboda, Cernik, Husak, Strougal – was dictated by that very Politburo to take part in fraternal deliberations (in Kiev on 11 December 1968). There Brezhnev, Kosygin and Podgorny expressed their satisfaction with the results of the November Czechoslovak Party plenum and with the resolution. They thought that Dubcek's speech at the plenum was not 'energetic enough'; they preferred Strougal's address. The 'opposition' was still strong in the mass information media and even in the Party's central organ *Rude pravo*. This had to be

\**Zpravy*, 22 February 1969.

† This new organ was created by the decision of the Central Committee in November 1968 (to be dissolved again in April 1969). It consisted of eight Praesidium members (Dubcek, Cernik, Husak, Smrkovsky, Svoboda, Sadovsky, Erban and Strougal). It was to act as a kind of super-Praesidium which, with 21 members, was too large to handle day-to-day Party affairs. The sky-rocketing ascension to power of Lubomir Strougal (the dogmatic opportunist who under Husak became, for a while, the second most powerful man in the country) should be noted here: at the November plenum, Strougal became full Praesidium member, Central Committee secretary, head of the powerful (also newly created) Central Committee Bureau for the Czech *Lands* (regions) to supplant the (in Moscow) unacceptable creation of a Czech Party and, finally of the Praesidium's Executive Committee. No doubt Moscow had full confidence in this former Minister of the Interior in the Novotny era.

changed, finally, by concrete measures. The Czechoslovak delegation agreed, and Dubcek raised the question of *Zpravy*. He was told that the Soviets had already once requested the registration of this publication but there had been no answer, anyhow it was 'surprising' that similar papers were published by the Soviet military in Poland and in the German Democratic Republic – without problems. The Czech comrades should rather worry about such men as Josef Smrkovsky who was 'the leader of rightist forces in the Party'; or about such persons as Ota Sik who was not only a rightist but lived abroad and could not possibly remain a member of the Central Committee. The Czechoslovak comrades were advised to return home and work hard at further consolidation and normalization. Both, incidentally, were not helped by too frequent meetings of the Central Committee: the leadership should learn to rule firmly from one single centre.

Soon after their return, in the Christmas period lull, Husak brought into the open the question of the Chairman of the Federal Parliament. On the eve of the official birth of the Slovak Socialist Republic, Husak claimed that the chairman of this body had to be a Slovak. What he did not say was that the function was occupied by Smrkovsky, then still a Praesidium member and one of the handful of faithful Dubcek supporters. Husak had always disliked him and, knowing the Soviet attitude to the matter, he decided to open a decisive drive against this popular leader. Smrkovsky's position from a purely technical point of view (with the presidency of the Republic and the premiership in the hands of Czechs) was a weak one since the Parliamentary chairmanship should change hands in favour of a Slovak candidate. Moreover, Dubcek handled the affair with his usual indecision while resolutions were pouring in in favour of Smrkovsky. Tension rose between Prague and Bratislava – exactly as Husak intended – and the trade unions, often in close co-operation with student organizations, addressed a number of political demands to the Party leadership. These demands, needless to add, were in contradiction with the November resolution. The hardliners, in turn, counter-attacked. Their position in the central Party organizations was strengthened (even Alois Indra, who had suffered a heart attack in the Soviet Union soon after the August events, secured a secretary's position).



Through channels available to them (*Zpravy, Vltava, Tribuna*) they repeated incessantly: either the Party policy 'as formulated in the November resolution and representing an optimal solution under present conditions' should be applied, or 'anti-Party interests' would prevail: in such a case 'immeasurable consequences' (meaning Soviet intervention) would follow.

Soon after the Christmas holidays, the tension rose to crisis level. Although (on 7 January) Smrkovsky was replaced as Chairman of the Federal Assembly by a Slovak (Peter Colotka, a middle-of-the-roader with reformist leanings), the campaign on the former's behalf (especially by the 950,000-strong Czech Metal Workers' Union) left its mark on the over-all climate of the country. Late in the evening on 2 January, Soviet Party Secretary Konstantin Katushev announced himself in Dubcek's office and remained with the First Secretary until two in the morning. Although nothing was announced about these talks, they must have been very serious since a full session of the Party Praesidium was called to an all-night session. Next day, the Praesidium issued a strongly worded statement in which it warned against inconsiderate actions which might end in 'tragic conflict'. It rejected as unfounded the view that the Slovak claim to chairmanship of the Federal Assembly was a move against Smrkovsky. Serious accusations were levelled against Czechoslovak press, radio and television. Their work and the developments in the country in general, it was said, complicated the situation within the country and Czechoslovakia's 'relations with her allies'. The following day Smrkovsky himself attempted to contribute towards a lessening of the tension. Later, on television, Dubcek pleaded with the people to desist from demonstrations or actions contrary to the policy of the Party leadership. Such behaviour might result in a crisis in which much of what had been achieved might be lost.

At a confidential meeting of Party officials and newspapermen with distinctly progressive leanings, Prime Minister Cernik declared that the position of the Dubcek leadership was 'almost hopeless'. This leadership was constantly faced with situations it was unable to handle, it was losing contact with the people, with the trade unions, with the young. It was being accused by its former liberal supporters of manipulating the Party, the press, of returning to Novotny's 'secret policy making'. This was

not so. However, should the Dubcek leadership and the Cernik government be unable to 'consolidate the situation', then the Soviets 'would simply stop dealing with us and would turn to others'. At about the same time, Gustav Husak from his base in Slovakia made his sharpest attack on 'pressure groups' in the Party and the mass media, the latter being 'solely responsible' for the new crisis. He demanded an offensive against all 'disruptive elements' that they be unmasked and identified.

In fact, new measures were taken (on 7 January 1969), designed to keep the press and the other media more strictly under control. In some cases, pre-publication censorship was reintroduced. A two-day plenary session of the Central Committee opened in Prague on 16 January, devoted entirely to the situation in the country. This situation deteriorated dramatically, indeed overnight, with the self-immolation of the young Czech student, Jan Palach. However, before this terrible and, in the annals of modern Czech history, unprecedented sacrifice had taken place at Wenceslas Square on 16 January, the dogmatists had launched a full-scale attack at the plenum. Some requested an official inquiry into the 'subversive activities' of Smrkovsky; others denounced those members of the Committee 'who were the signatories of the Two Thousand Words Proclamation'. Husak accused Smrkovsky of 'Czech nationalism' and declared that while Svoboda, Cernik and he himself were always ready to resign from their offices, 'Smrkovsky, of course, would not dream of such a thing'. Strougal concluded that 'the Party's policy was currently based on two planks which were irreconcilable', and made it clear that unless this deep split be overcome, the Party could not rule the country.

However the act of Jan Palach, and his death on 19 January, the political motives of his decision (basically a protest against the occupation) and, of course, the tremendous impact the tragedy had on the entire population, crossed with the hardliners' plans. Their onslaught in the Central Committee was fragmented by these events and for a while their drive was slowed down. The Dubcek leadership feared, however, that the situation might get out of hand. Incidents were reported on 18-19 January, involving attacks on Soviet army vehicles and demonstrations by groups of young people who shouted: 'Hang Brezhnev!' Several telephone conversations with the Soviet Party

Secretary ensued and Dubcek warned that a 'tragic situation' might develop if even a small group of Soviet soldiers appeared in the streets. Brezhnev professed understanding and promised that appropriate orders would be given to commanders of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia.\*

The Czechoslovak leadership's decision to leave the arrangements for Palach's funeral entirely in the hands of student organizations in Prague, including responsibility for preserving order, proved to be a correct one. The rites were huge, impressive and most dignified.† But the lull in the vicious struggle in the Party was of short duration. As a well-known hardliner and Central Committee member Jan Havelka declared at a Society of Soviet-Czechoslovak Friendship meeting, organized on the good old pattern of fascist gangs: 'It will be either them or us – but never together, just as water does not mix with oil; sooner or later there will be a clash.'

\*The Soviet Party Politburo addressed an urgent letter to the Party Praesidium in Prague (received in the Czech capital on 18 January), which was however written in a conciliatory tone. While repeating its old apprehensions, the Politburo assured them that Moscow would not interfere in Czechoslovakia's affairs as long as the process of consolidation continued.

†In the weeks to follow, there were a number of other suicides of young people, notably that of the student Jan Zajic. The authorities never fully explained the motives inspiring these acts in order to play down their tragic nature.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FINALE: THE 'ICE-HOCKEY' CRISIS

AFTER the January crisis, the question was no longer whether a clash would take place but rather whether it would prove the final crisis and provoke the fall of Alexander Dubcek and promote a new leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, a united, conservative, pro-Soviet leadership. It was no less apparent that such a change-over could be brought about either by a second Soviet military intervention, or an internal takeover; possibly by a combination of both. Ideally, Dubcek's successor would be installed by irresistible pressure, or by provocation organized by the domestic forces with a parallel threat of a new Soviet occupation.

The crisis which decided the fate of Alexander Dubcek and of the Prague Spring is known as the 'ice-hockey game affair'. This should not be too surprising: the sixteen months of the Dubcek era were full of absurd turns, and its end could be expected to have a carnival-like aspect.

It all started quite innocently. On Friday 28 March the Czechoslovak hockey team scored a second victory over the Soviet team at the world championship in Stockholm. 'They left their hearts on the ice,' proclaimed *Rude pravo* in an inch-high headline announcing the news. Another Prague paper suggested that the Czech victory, 'fantastic, incredible as it was . . . must be seen as having connotations which have little to do with hockey. . . The entire nation was behind the Czech players, all united by one single and well-known idea. . .' *Lidova demokracie*, the People's Party daily, noted that the Soviet team, 'this non-professional group of players who are on the ice eleven months of the year obviously forgot that the brain is sometimes more powerful than muscle, and that the Czech desire and will to win had overcome the biggest obstacles'. Dubcek, Cernik, Smrkovsky and other leaders sent congratulatory telegrams to the Czech team manager.

Practically the entire Czech and Slovak people watched the match as it was transmitted live from Stockholm. Immediately after its conclusion, a collective jubilation exploded which has no parallel in modern Czech history. *Rude pravo* itself on 29 March described this night of national rejoicing in glowing terms:

Immediately after the conclusion of the game people started to stream into the streets of Prague, the horns of thousands of cars blew. Wenceslas Square was everybody's destination. Improvised fireworks, bonfires and firecrackers suddenly lit up the night. Music could be heard from the windows of houses which were also lit up. In about thirty minutes, about a hundred or a hundred and fifty thousand people were celebrating the victory and others were still arriving. St. Wenceslas' statue was covered with flowers. Trams and buses joined in the pandemonium. In Bratislava, the scene was similar. The centre of the town was flooded with people, both young and old, all rejoicing at the great victory.

This popular enthusiasm, however, took a more vicious turn for reasons never properly explained: a group of people began to stone, and later forcibly entered, the Soviet Aeroflot bureau on Prague's Wenceslas Square, demolished its equipment and set it on fire. It has ever since been debated, in Prague and elsewhere, whether this incident was spontaneous or whether it was a provocation mounted by agents of the political police. The Czech Ministry of the Interior announced that the initiators of this act of vandalism would be discovered and brought to justice, but this never happened. The promised report on the incident was never published. This lack of fervour from an otherwise agile police force, always keen to detect hooligan and anti-socialist elements, was all the more suspicious in that the demolition of the Aeroflot office, an incident which under normal circumstances would be settled by diplomatic measures customary in such cases, was to develop into a first-class crisis in the already strained Czechoslovak-Soviet relations.

It is unlikely that the whole truth about the Aeroflot incident will be known as long as the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior is headed by men who may have been involved in the affair. On the other hand, in retrospect, most observers have concluded that it matters little whether the incident was a police

provocation or not, and there are three reasons to support this hypothesis. If this particular incident at Wenceslas Square had not occurred, another similar incident would sooner or later have served as a pretext for renewed Soviet pressures and demands. Secondly, it was known that the ultra-conservative elements in the Party were preparing provocations for the first of May celebrations or for the ninth of May, Liberation Day. Finally, the demolition of the Aeroflot office was only one in a series of similar incidents in other Czechoslovak towns which alarmed local Soviet commanders and contributed to the opening of a new top-level inquiry by Moscow into developments in Czechoslovakia.

According to reliable sources in the Federal Ministry of the Interior (in which there were still men loyal to Dubcek), the conservatives needed a pretext that would enable them to call on the Soviets to pressurize Prague sufficiently to eliminate the liberal wing of the Czechoslovak Party as a political force. The same sources reported that during Vasil Bilak's visit to Moscow in mid-March, several high-ranking Soviet officials asked this faithful comrade to explain why 'the healthy forces' in the Czechoslovak Party were so passive and unable to proceed energetically with 'normalization'. Bilak had to admit that he and his friends were 'isolated' both in the Party and even more so in the country as a whole, that they were still considered 'collaborators' and that they, and even members of their families, were openly ostracized. Consequently, the 'healthy forces' were too weak to attempt a takeover without an 'effective exterior impulse'. One possibility was for Moscow to express dissatisfaction with the pace of normalization in Czechoslovakia by giving a serious warning of a second military intervention, combined with a promise that such an intervention would *not* take place if and when the 'healthy forces' took control of the Party. A few hours after the Aeroflot incident, the Soviet Ambassador in Prague, Chervonenko, lodged a formal protest with the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, requesting, as was his right, an apology from the Czechoslovak government, the punishment of those who had perpetrated the incident and payment for the damage. Otherwise, there were no signs of alarm from Moscow.

But only forty-eight hours later the Soviet Party leadership

blew the incident up into the greatest Czechoslovak-Soviet crisis since the August invasion. While the reasons for this delay are not quite clear it may be assumed that the ultra-conservative forces on both the Soviet and Czechoslovak sides succeeded in persuading the Soviet Politburo that the situation in Czechoslovakia had once again got 'out of hand', that the Dubcek leadership was unable or unwilling to honour the Moscow Protocol, and that the ice-hockey affair offered a timely opportunity to put some order into Czechoslovak affairs.

Their arguments in favour of a second intervention were greatly advanced by reports arriving in Moscow over the weekend from the commanders of the Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia. They reported that anti-Soviet demonstrations had taken place in all the major towns, that these 'provocations' were enthusiastically supported by the population, and that members of the Czechoslovak security and armed forces had taken part in them. Incidents took place in several Czech towns when Czechoslovak soldiers 'ridiculed' the Soviet units, and in more than one case shots were exchanged. Even more serious, in all the thirty-five localities where Soviet troops were stationed, Soviet commanders had requested prompt action by Czech forces against the demonstrators and the requests had been either ignored or explicitly rejected. This fact could only mean that the Czechoslovak armed forces were unreliable and in a state of partial disintegration.

The alarmist nature of these reports gave rise to an emergency session of the Politburo, the most important Soviet Party body. It met on Monday 31 March in the morning, and the decisions taken were immediately put into practice. The nature of these decisions came to be known from a report dated 4 April 1969, prepared for First Secretary Dubcek, by his Secretariat, containing the following points:

In the afternoon of 31 March, Defence Minister Marshal Andrei Grechko, accompanied by a group of the U.S.S.R. armed forces general staff, landed unannounced at Milovice, the headquarters of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia. At the same time, Konstantin Semyonov, the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, arrived at Prague Airport. As comrades Svoboda, Dubcek, Cernik and others were at that time visiting Czechoslovak units on the western borders, Semyonov was received in the evening by

Deputy Prime Minister Hamouz to whom he gave a verbal account of the Soviet protest note he had brought with him.

In this note, the Soviets declared that on the night of the 28-9 March 1969, demonstrations of an outspoken counter-revolutionary character had taken place in Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovak soldiers had taken part in them. The extreme rightist forces had timed this action to coincide with a moment of general emotional upsurge. Slogans such as : 'Serves you right for Oussouri' had appeared. These provocations had been co-ordinated with forces abroad. The mass media had constantly played up provocative anti-Soviet moods. The Party press, including *Rude pravo*, had taken part in these anti-Soviet provocations. The Soviets considered this a serious breach of the Moscow Protocol. The extent and nature of the August 1968 counter-revolutionary actions proved that there were people in the leadership interested in anti-Soviet campaigns.

The Soviets found themselves confronted with a fundamental question : was there enough resolution, and indeed enough goodwill in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to counter the incitement of anti-Soviet passions? The Soviet side proposed the following solutions :

1. The Czechoslovak leadership would restore order itself and strengthen the organs of state power in a radical manner, especially the security forces, introduce pre-publication censorship, stop discussions concerning the leading role of the Party, and put an end to polemics with the Socialist countries.
2. The Czechoslovak leadership would draw the conclusion that it was on in its power to restore order in the country, and would call on the Warsaw Pact countries to help it put down the counter-revolution.
3. If nothing were done, as suggested in 1, or 2, the Warsaw Pact countries would intervene in accordance with their own judgement.

These excerpts from the Prague report must be supplemented by information from other Party sources to complete the picture. A chosen number of Czechoslovak generals, all of them dogmatists or Soviet agents, had been informed several hours in advance of Marshal Grechko's arrival at Milovice. He was received with full military honours. At a subsequent meeting



with a larger group of Czechoslovak officers, the Soviet Marshal 'raised hell'. He read out a long list of demonstrations and 'provocations' allegedly committed on the night of the hockey victory by members of the Czechoslovak armed forces; condemned the refusal of Czech military authorities to come to the aid of the Soviet contingents as 'counter-revolutionary'; criticized severely the 'lack of military, moral as well as political preparedness' of the Czechoslovak armed forces, and finally announced that the Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia had been strengthened by 35,000 men, and that in the neighbouring socialist countries a state of emergency had been proclaimed as far as the armed forces were concerned. Grechko added that Czechoslovakia would certainly follow suit.

At the time of Grechko's lightning visit, there were reports in the Western press that this intervention had been in the form of an ultimatum, and that a group of Czech generals was ready to stage a military coup on the pattern of the South American 'banana Republics' and install themselves as a revolutionary government. These reports, although exaggerated, were not entirely without foundation. The Soviet note had all the ingredients of an ultimatum; and the pro-Soviet generals, assembled at Milovice on that Monday afternoon of 31 March, had worked in collusion with their Soviet counterparts. However, the Party leadership in Moscow wanted to have the new Czechoslovak crisis solved by political means, if at all possible, which under the circumstances meant exploiting to the full the threat of a military intervention without actually ordering the military commanders to move into the streets of Prague and other Czechoslovak cities. As for a military coup, no doubt pro-Soviet generals, notably General Dvorak, State Secretary in the Ministry of Defence and an intimate friend of the Czech Party leader Strougal, General Bedrich, head of the Main Political Administration of the army, and the long-time friend of Novotny, General Rytir, were keen and prepared to take over power in the country. But this was out of the question without the consent of their Commander-in-Chief, who was none other than President Svoboda and also, to a lesser degree, of the Minister of Defence, General Martin Dzur. The former, one can assume, was resolutely opposed to such a solution of the crisis and the latter was not only reluctant but also informed his

Slovak compatriot Dubcek of these various schemes of the military though, in fact, they never came near to being actually put into practice.

What happened at Milovice immediately after Marshal Grechko's tirades was as follows: The officers returned to Prague and on the same evening an emergency session of the so-called Military Council of the Ministry of Defence took place under the chairmanship of Minister Dzur. This body prepared an urgent memorandum to be presented the next day to the Executive Committee of the Party's Praesidium for consideration. The memorandum more or less accepted the Soviet requirements and recommended that they be put into practice immediately. It requested that Soviet commands be formed in all county towns, and that other localities be patrolled by combined groups of police and soldiers, supported by helicopters, and that the armed forces be purged of those officers guilty of 'anti-Soviet sentiments'.

The next day, 1 April, at 8.30 in the morning Marshal Grechko paid a visit to General Dzur. At ten o'clock he left for Prague Castle, accompanied by Semyonov and the Soviet Ambassador. The Soviet delegation was received by President Svoboda, Dubcek and Cernik. The talk was short and the atmosphere icy. Svoboda was furious that Grechko had come to Czechoslovakia unannounced. 'These Soviet generals come and go as if we were a Soviet Guberny,' he remarked to his secretary. Dubcek's behaviour was dignified and resolute. According to the report already quoted :

. . . Marshal Grechko spoke severely. The Soviets wanted to make it clear that this was the last warning and that radical measures must be taken at once by the Czechoslovak authorities. The Soviet leadership had come to the conclusion that the leading Czechoslovak authorities did not want to put an end to the irregularities. The situation in the Czechoslovak army was untenable, part of the army had disintegrated. - Semyonov said that the Soviet authorities 'could hardly find words' to express their indignation at the situation in Czechoslovakia: it was even worse than in the previous August. In any case, the time for negotiations and discussions was over, now only deeds could speak.

The meeting ended with the assurance on our side that the Praesidium of the Central Committee of the Party would be

called at once and that energetic measures would be taken.

The meeting of the Praesidium opened at eight in the evening but was preceded by an all-afternoon conference of the Executive Committee. The mood in that restrained eight-member body had been militant. Even Gustav Husak had criticized the 'strange manners' of the Soviet generals and added that in these circumstances it would perhaps be better to leave the Soviet comrades to direct the show in Czechoslovakia single-handed. However, nothing was decided. The full Praesidium session lasted until seven in the morning and President Svoboda took part in it. Once again Soviet complaints were discussed and, as could be expected, some conservative and centrist members found themselves in agreement with the Soviet position. Most noticeable, however, was the complete change in Husak's attitude. He remained silent for long hours. Eventually, late at night, he addressed the Praesidium in ironic tones, to the effect that everybody was talking a lot and crying over spilt milk, noble perhaps but totally irrelevant. Concrete decisions had to be made, otherwise the country would sink into chaos.

Whatever the reason for this sudden change in Husak's position (had he come to the conclusion that his moment had arrived?), it provided the spark Strougal, Bilak and Piller were waiting for. They went over to the offensive and their arguments were supported by the centrists, notably Cernik and Svoboda, thus isolating Smrkovsky, and the other reformists in the Praesidium completely. The argument of the majority was persuasive: either we do something effective immediately, or the Soviet comrades will do it for us.

Finally the Praesidium drafted a statement which was read over Czechoslovak radio throughout the next day. In its main points the statement agreed with the Soviet position. The events of the night 28-29 March were described not only as acts of vandalism but also as 'not accidental', carried out in an atmosphere of 'artificially provoked emotions' fostered by the mass media and 'intensive foreign bourgeois propaganda'. Moreover, publications like *Listy*, *Reporter* and *Zitrek*, but also *Rude pravo*, were condemned for lacking true communist spirit and for not opposing 'views alien to socialism' sufficiently. The statement put the blame for anti-Soviet excesses on 'anti-

Socialist' and 'rightist opportunist' forces – thus for the first time since the invasion the Party leadership identified itself fully with the Soviet assessment of developments in Czechoslovakia.

On the same day, the Federal government issued a declaration which included measures designed to 'secure peace and order': the ring leaders and perpetrators of the ice-hockey game demonstrations were to be found and punished; the police had to be augmented, their technical equipment improved, and the army was to assist the police if necessary; pre-publication censorship was to be introduced at once in those communications media which would offer no guarantee of an editorial policy consistent with 'important domestic and foreign policy interests'; the 'anti-Socialist forces' would be 'systematically sought after and brought to justice'.

Would the Russians be satisfied with these measures or not? This was the question evaluated at yet another emergency session of the Praesidium. Nobody knew the answer for certain, though Grechko had shown signs of good humour a little earlier. In any case, no satisfactory answer was possible, for even if Moscow did congratulate itself that something had at last been done to fight the 'anti-Soviet forces', only half the task was done. It remained to put the 'healthy forces' in the Czechoslovak Party into positions of command.

Dubcek himself, unwittingly as always, gave them a helping hand. Acting upon the directives of the Praesidium, the First Secretary, in a television speech on 3 April, agreed to a large extent with the basic demands of the Soviets and of their domestic collaborators. He admitted that 'anti-Soviet and anti-Socialist forces exist in our country', that 'the time we have for consolidation is not unlimited', and 'that either public order will be restored at once . . . or . . . we will find ourselves in the same situation we were in at the end of last August'.

On that very same day, an extraordinary meeting of the Slovak Party Praesidium under the expert command of its First Secretary, Gustav Husak, fired a well-aimed salvo at the Prague reformists. The Slovak Praesidium had concluded that the violent incidents of 28–9 March had an 'evidently terrorist and counter-revolutionary character'. Such evaluations had thus far only appeared in the assessments put out by the ultra-dogmatists. Later, on 11 April, Husak himself took up the battle cry and

made it clear that no real improvements could be made in the serious situation in Czechoslovakia unless changes were made in the top leadership. He accused the leadership of failing to prevent the activity of 'anti-Socialist' forces and 'irresponsible elements' which had propagated anti-Party and anti-State views and had introduced anarchy into the country. The leadership, said Husak, was guilty of tolerating this activity since it merely issued resolutions without insisting on their implementation. The cause of this weakness was the disunity of the highest Party bodies, including the Praesidium and the Central Committee. He declared that it was 'high time' to take radical steps to introduce order.

With this speech the crisis entered its decisive phase. The Slovak Party leader, doubtlessly in collusion with some members of the Soviet leadership (Marshal Grechko conferred with Husak in Bratislava on 4 April), openly criticized the reformist Party leadership of Alexander Dubcek (of which he himself had not been a member in the crucial months between January and August 1968). However, Husak was careful enough to praise President Svoboda in another context and to show consideration for 'realists' of the Cernik type, thus isolating Dubcek, Smrkovsky, Spacek and the other reformists.

Some ten days after the hockey crisis, the ground was prepared for the final assault. The 'progressive front' in the Party was rapidly disintegrating; the solidarity of the top political leadership of August 1968 was long a thing of the past. One of its main pillars, Josef Smrkovsky, was publicly reprimanded by the Praesidium and (on 15 April) the veteran communist recanted his alleged errors in *Rude pravo*. Progressives, whether in the press, the radio, the trades unions or youth movements, were gradually reduced to silence and, instead of their lucid writings, worn-out slogans and ideological mince-meat were again served. Little wonder that a sense of futility and resignation spread fast among the intellectuals and the population at large.

The information media of the Five pursued their drive accordingly. Radio Moscow noted that the Czechoslovak press of the previous period 'brought to mind Germany of the years 1933-45'; the Ulbricht papers in Berlin requested that the measures suggested by Grechko and Semyonov be 'put into force at once' in Czechoslovakia. A Hungarian government note

received in Prague on 4 April declared that measures taken up to now by the Czechoslovak government were 'insufficient'.

On Tuesday 8 April, the Praesidium was convoked for its regular weekly session. It was described by one of the participants as a 'meeting at which a kind of fatal fatigue befell the heroes of the Prague Spring'. With the possible exception of Smrkovsky, they did not even refute the insistent reproaches of Strougal, Husak, Piller and others, that Dubcek and his friends were weak and undecided, and that this 'eternal sequence of crises' as Husak termed it, had to come to an end. When the decision had been made to call a plenary session of the Central Committee for 17 April at Prague Castle, few doubted that the denouement was at hand. Several factions of leading hardliners, centrists and 'realists' in the Party apparatus engaged in a week of feverish activity, intrigues and jockeying for positions. On 12 April the Praesidium's Executive Committee condemned what were termed 'external pressures' – that is, the many declarations of faith in Dubcek, Smrkovsky and other reformers, addressed to Party headquarters by hundreds of trade union, youth and other organizations. On the same day, in the space of two hours, the Prague government first announced and then, just as mysteriously, denied its own report about Soviet reinforcements being brought into Czechoslovakia. On 14 April, 'air defence' manoeuvres of the Warsaw Pact began in Czechoslovakia – another psychological warfare move to impress upon everybody both in the Party and outside it that the Soviets meant business. Finally, on the eve of the Central Committee plenum, the Executive Committee publicly rehabilitated ten high-ranking Party officials who had been guilty of collaboration or at least collusion with the Soviets during the fatal final week of August 1968. As if to crown all this, there was also on the eve of the plenum a demonstration of police strength throughout the country; according to Radio Prague, 894 persons were detained in Bohemia and Moravia while in Slovakia over 2,300 persons were searched and 135 of them detained.

The weekend preceding the Central Committee meeting, the Executive Committee was in session once again. The main items discussed were draft reports to be presented to the Central Committee. The hardliners under Strougal's directives presented 'theses' concerning internal developments in Czechoslovakia

during the previous week, closely conforming to the Soviet point of view. The draft, however, was rejected by a majority of the Executive Committee. During the weekend, Dubcek met in private with Svoboda, Cernik and the National Front chairman Erban and asked their opinion as to whether he should resign as First Secretary. He knew that since Smrkovsky had been eliminated to all practical purposes the solidarity of the 'Big Four' had been broken, that he was isolated in the Executive Committee and the Praesidium, and that even the centrists with Husak at the helm would do everything in their power, with Soviet support behind them, to bring about his fall. In these conversations, the well-meaning Dubcek was reportedly 'shattered' by Svoboda's lukewarm attitude, as he even showed signs of impatience while listening to the lamentations of his colleague. But there was another unpleasant surprise in store for him: at the last meeting of the Executive Committee prior to the Central Committee Plenum it was Svoboda who fastened with lightning speed on Dubcek's rather long-winded self-criticism and his query as to whether changes in the leadership should not be made, interpreting it as a signal for Dubcek's resignation, and proposing Gustav Husak as his successor.

Consequently, this fateful plenary session on 17 April was of unprecedented brevity. A few hours sufficed to make a fundamental reshuffle in the leading Party offices. Most important, the replacement of Dubcek, the symbol of the Prague Spring, by a new leader, Gustav Husak; already at 2 p.m. on the same day Svoboda himself described Husak in a radio and television speech as an 'honest, experienced and far-sighted politician, devoted to the Party and the people'.

The Party Praesidium with its twenty-one members and the Executive Committee with its eight members were replaced by an eleven-member Praesidium of which Alexander Dubcek (but no longer Josef Smrkovsky) was still a member. The others were Gustav Husak, Oldrick Cernik, Evzen Erban, the Slovak Stefan Sadowsky, who took over the First Secretaryship of the Slovak C.P. from Husak, Lubomir Strougal, Ludvik Svoboda, Vasil Bilak, Jan Piller, Peter Colotka (who took over the Chairmanship of the Federal Assembly from Smrkovsky, only to give it up to become Prime Minister of the Slovak government), and Karel Polacek (Chairman of the Czechoslovak trade union movement).

The ten former members of the Praesidium dropped, were all radical or moderate reformers.

The curtain was falling on the Prague Spring, and its unwilling hero, Alexander Dubcek, still smiling his slightly embarrassed but now saddened smile, the sentimental Marxist who had wanted to give socialism distinctly humane features, could be seen three days after his fall clapping in the good old Stalinist style, at a celebration of the 99th Anniversary of Lenin. 'Long live the Soviet Union', 'Long live the Communist Party of the Soviet Union', shouted several hundred fanatics brought in buses and trucks to the congress hall in Prague. It seemed that, once or twice, Alexander Dubcek attempted to join the chorus. It was a terrifying sight. A few days later he was 'elected' chairman of the Federal Assembly with a sad man by the name of Josef Smrkovsky as his deputy. There was only one question still to be answered; when and how the *coup de grâce* would be given to these two heroes of a remarkable period in Czech and, indeed, European history.



## IV Winter in Prague

### CHAPTER ONE

#### INTRIGUES AND REVENGE

Let's get them, comrades.  
Let's take by storm the  
remaining bastions of the  
rightist forces; chase the  
adventurers wherever they  
may be. . .

Radio Prague, 20 August 1969

THE bespectacled, greying man at the rostrum could be a politician or a small-town lawyer, obliging and smart, if somewhat obviously a *petit bourgeois*. He started to speak, quietly, slowly, without a paper or notes in his hands. He peered intently at his audience as if to assess its potentialities, warming to his subject, making an aside here and a biting attack there, visibly encouraged by applause or laughter, raising his voice and, with the relish of a man displaying his well-tryed skills, lashing out at what seemed to be his personal enemies :

Those people, whose mouths are full of democracy, are so deeply undemocratic that they will not recognize the elementary rights of citizens, workers, peasants and technicians. They do this so that they can become the elite which they already imagine themselves to be. We need no elites. . . The anti-socialist and various opportunist forces strove to crush and destroy the political power of the working people in this state, and loosen the leading role of the Communist Party, the state power and the state apparatus, to wreck . . . to divide. . .

The setting for this scene was the historic Slovak town of Nitra, the date 11 April 1969, and the speaker at the rostrum Dr Gustav Husak. He was, indeed, a mixture of politician, provincial lawyer, and bourgeois intellectual arousing the working

masses. A week later he was to become the first man of his Party and his country.

Gustav Husak was born in 1913 and became a lawyer by profession. In the thirties, he belonged to the younger guard of the Slovak communists, which was linked mainly with the students and the intellectual movement, and included men like Vladimir Clementis, who later became the Czechoslovak Foreign Secretary and was executed in the Slansky trial, and the poet Ladislav Novomesky.

During the Second World War Husak, with Novomesky and Karol Smidke (who died in the early 1950s), was a leader of the Slovak National Uprising, one of the biggest resistance upsurges in Europe. After the war he became vice-president and later president of the autonomous Slovak Government in the restored Czechoslovak Republic. While the Slovak communists who had fought the Nazis in Slovakia took firm control of the Party leadership in Bratislava (they were known as the Party of doctors because they were recruited mainly from the intellectuals), the Slovak communists who had spent the war in Moscow got into important positions in the Party and state institutions in Prague.

The tension between these two groups had a very important consequence. When the Czechoslovak trials took place after 1951 it became clear that the proceedings in Prague, beginning with Slansky, were prefabricated by the police. The trials of the so-called Slovak nationalists – Husak, Novomesky and others – were on the other hand truly political trials up to a point, used by the Moscow and Prague group of Slovak communists to liquidate the more popular Bratislava group.

Husak gave a detailed account (a hundred typewritten pages) of the methods employed in his interrogation. In this statement of accusation – which was denied publication but which was circulated in secret within the Party – Husak described the installations of the security police in the castle of Kolodeje near Prague, where the most important suspects were detained for months at a time. The prisoner under interrogation was left in his underclothes in a room where the temperature was less than twenty degrees. After a while, dressed in very warm clothing, he was transferred to a room where there were no windows and where the walls and ceiling were covered in the same paper;

there, the temperature was forty degrees. Very soon the victim lost all sense of space, and had the illusion that the walls and ceiling were closing in on him and threatening to crush him. The police who conducted the interrogations entered by a door which was invisible from within the room. They were dressed in shorts and light shirts, and were replaced every five or ten minutes. After thirty or forty sessions of this kind, depending on the patient's 'limit of resistance', the prisoners signed a confession prepared beforehand in which they themselves assumed responsibility for the most unbelievable crimes. Husak himself, who resisted longer than the others, twice refused to sign. In the end, broken and ill, he signed. Nevertheless, the trial had to be postponed several times; it could not be held in public. Husak was given a life sentence.

When he was released after six years in prison, and after having been partly rehabilitated in 1963, Husak remained a determined opponent of Novotny and of all those who had taken part in the crusade against the so-called Slovak nationalists. A highly intelligent, cool man and toughened by his experiences, Husak patiently awaited his opportunity while working as a researcher in the Department of History at the Slovak Academy of Sciences. That opportunity came in January 1968 and the top Party job fell to him in April 1969.

*The Times* devoted an entire page and a long editorial (on 19 April 1969) to what it called 'this new Czechoslovak leader of an old-fashioned style', and commented:

The romance and the romantics are going out of Czechoslovak politics. The fact of the occupation will now be more squarely faced. The sadness will be greater but the emotional stress will be less. Things could have been worse.

Could they really have been? What was meant was that men like Indra or Salgovic could have taken over from Dubcek directly, eliminating the centrists and 'realists' from power, and thus squashing even the faint hope that things would not take a turn for the worse too fast, i.e. to a full re-satellization and re-Stalinization of the country. This might have been true if the issue had been solely one of goodwill. After all, in spite of his out-dated political thinking, old-fashioned revolutionary

zeal and vocabulary, Husak could be relied upon to try to avoid the restrictive policies, the mistakes, the stupidity and the judicial crimes of the Novotny era. Unfortunately, a totalitarian system which had only just survived its effort to liberalize itself could not but return, and fast at that, to the old discredited modes and methods of securing and retaining undiluted power. In the Czechoslovak case, moreover, there were no alternatives: the post-Dubcek leadership had to assert this power against a rebellious people, an entire young generation, and almost all the rank-and-file of the Party. This opposition would certainly show itself on all possible occasions. There was no alternative but to hold it in check by a *systematic* tightening of the screws – no matter what the good intentions of those charged with preserving supreme power.

Indeed, Husak and members of his ruling team (which consisted of Soviet 'advisers', domestic hardliners, some of them former associates of Novotny, and of 'centrists' who were inevitably pushed even further to the conservative side), moved steadily in a single direction: to imposing, step by step, a rigid, neo-Stalinist regime which was gradually to display most of the ugly features of the Novotny system, accompanied by a cynicism unheard of even in that miserable era.

First things come first. Five days after his accession to supreme power, Husak left for Moscow to attend the long-delayed summit meeting of COMECON. There, of course, the interest to Prague was whether the Soviets might be willing to make concessions to Husak that they had consistently denied to Dubcek. Specific mention was made of the possibility of a partial withdrawal of the Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia, a substantial hard currency loan and the possible suspension of *Zpravy*. However, nothing came of it. The Soviets had every reason, and also all the time, to wait and see how the new First Secretary would prove his mettle.

In the meantime, the hardliners were not idle at home. At a Party Praesidium session on 22 April, it was decided that the Central Committee weekly *Politika* would be discontinued and replaced by a new weekly called *Tvorba* under the editorship of the dogmatic Jiri Hajek. Another hardliner of Novotny fame, Miroslav Moc, took over the Party's main organ *Rude pravo*, together with a phalanx of conservative editors, all of

them old Party hacks. At the same time it was announced that the government had appointed a new Federal Committee for Press and Information, which was to become the supreme censorship office.

Soon after, major changes were made in a number of regional Party papers, and progressive editors and journalists were simply fired or eliminated. Seventeen progressive journalists who had made names for themselves during the Prague Spring were summoned to the Party Control and Auditing Commission and informed that disciplinary proceedings had been initiated against them. Radio Prague announced on 15 May that the Czech office for Press and Information had decided to ban the most popular Czechoslovak weeklies, *Listy* and *Reporter*. *Listy* was published in 200,000 to 300,000 copies, and *Reporter* was issued in over 100,000 copies. The suppression of these two influential publications was not only a blow to the Czech intelligentsia at large but constituted an intervention in the legitimate activities of the intellectuals' unions, those of the writers and of the journalists.

On 17 May, *Rude pravo* published a petition signed by 130 Czechoslovak journalists, radio and TV men entitled 'A word to our own ranks' which blasted the reformers in the public communications media and criticized the former Party leadership for having tolerated their activities. The great majority of those who signed this hardline document were unknown or second-rate people, with a generous mixture of so-called 'newspapermen' from the Party or state apparatus.

After the press, Party organizations on regional and district level had to be purged of progressives. Similarly, the judiciary had to be purged of its reformists as well.

By the end of May, or more precisely on 30 May, the Central Committee adopted three resolutions at a two-day session. The main one defined a guide-line for Party activities up to the Fourteenth Congress. A second resolution concerned the Party's attitude towards the coming Moscow summit, while the third, 'pertaining to questions of organization and cadres' concerned itself with the purge of, and disciplinary measures against, prominent post-January reformers.

The social and mass organizations were again to play the role of transmission belts. The Party rejected the post-January 1968

concept of the plurality of social life, and denied that the National Front was a coalition of political parties and mass organizations. It was stressed that no partnership in the sense of political competition could exist in the National Front: the leading role of the Party was 'objectively necessary' for the development of a socialist society. In more specific terms, the resolution criticized trade unions and the communists in them for having adopted the wrong platform. Youth organizations were also attacked for their erroneous political line, and students were explicitly warned that their union could not be active outside the National Front. Party influence was to be increased in relation to the intelligentsia.

The resolution involved mostly Party disciplinary measures adopted by the Central Committee against prominent reformers. Frantisek Kriegel was expelled not only from the Central Committee as originally planned but from the Communist Party. The reason for this was that the previous October he had voted against the Czechoslovak Soviet Statutes of Forces Treaty in the National Assembly. Moreover, Kriegel had stuck to his position in an audacious speech delivered at this Central Committee session, and which had circulated in thousands of copies throughout Czechoslovakia. Another veteran Party official, Frantisek Vodslon, was expelled from the Central Committee. A Party reprimand for 'not having adhered to Party discipline' was given to a number of Central Committee members. The other cause for disciplinary action was the attitude of Central Committee members towards the 'Two Thousand Words' manifesto. Those members who had signed this document or the additional one following it, and who would not repent or carry out self-criticism later, were expelled from the Central Committee: notably the well-known philosopher Karel Kosik and the playwright Frantisek Pavlicek. Others, who had expressed 'regret' afterwards, were given so-called reprimands.

Ota Sik was expelled from the Central Committee because his activities abroad were considered contrary to the Central Committee's November resolution. Sik, who returned to Prague to defend himself, tried twice to justify his position, but in vain. The liberal Party official, Josef Spacek, who later lost his post as leading Secretary in South Moravia, was also released from his post as Central Committee Secretary. In view of 'repeated

criticism' of the activities of people like Milan Hubl and General Vaclav Prchlik, the Central Committee entrusted the Praesidium with forming a special commission to investigate their activities. Yet another commission was created to investigate the activities of members of the government who had remained abroad after the invasion, such as the former Foreign Minister, Jiri Hajek.

Thus began the long-expected purge of the most influential reformists from the top Party organs. An extraordinary plenary session of the Prague Municipal Party Committee, an extremely important organization, took place on 2 June, attended by a very strong Praesidium delegation with Husak at its head. It was a stormy meeting, and one of the Committee members, the journalist Karel Kyncl, delivered a fierce personal attack on Husak. Finally, this Party organization, one of the most progressive, offered the collective resignation of its entire Praesidium.

These were fine gestures of protest, but lacked any real political impact, except on public opinion which viewed this tremendous onslaught with the greatest misgiving. Early in June the Control and Auditing Commission discussed the case of one of its members, the infamous Viliam Salgovic, and concluded that all the accusations raised against Salgovic for his behaviour during the week of the invasion had been unfounded. They proceeded to express 'full confidence' in him.\* Regional Party organizations apologized publicly to such people as Drahomir Kolder and Alois Indra for whatever had been said or published about them during the August crisis.

In the meantime, the long-awaited Summit Conference opened in Moscow. The Czechoslovak delegation, headed by Husak, made it known in advance that it would refuse any attempt at what it called 'internationalization' of the Czechoslovak issue. However, some delegates, for example the Italian and British comrades, did not hesitate to raise the Czechoslovak question at the Moscow summit. Yet it was Husak himself and not the Soviets who gave an answer to the various critical points raised. Husak dealt at length with the Czechoslovak situation as it had developed since January 1968. He said that the developments had led to an ideological and class struggle. Socialist power, guaranteed by the leading role of the Party, had been

\*In September 1970, Salgovic was named vice-chairman of the very commission which had originally investigated his case.

seriously threatened especially after 'increased imperialist pressures from abroad'. He stressed that the Czechoslovak Party refused to simplify these events, that it would have to return to them and seek a truthful, honest Marxist analysis. He even expressed his astonishment at the fact that some fraternal parties, though only superficially informed, should jump to hasty conclusions. He added: 'The question is often raised: were there enough internal forces in the country to defend socialist achievements? Yes, there were enough.' This was a key sentence which, later on, he was to wish he had never uttered.

There is little doubt that while in Moscow Husak did a real favour to the Soviet Party leadership, which found itself in a rather difficult situation. In return, the Soviets displayed their satisfaction with the new First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in various ways. After his return to Prague, Husak stressed the alleged successes of the Moscow conference, and proudly pointed out the fact that not only the 'so-called Czechoslovak question' but the entire Czechoslovak delegation had been the focus of the interest for all the fraternal parties. Indeed, Husak seemed quite happy with his achievements and at a conference of leading regional and district Party Secretaries, convened at Prague Castle on 26 June, he voiced his satisfaction with the progress so far achieved both internationally and at home.

However, Husak stressed that the next task was to carry the ideological struggle down to the basic organizations and enterprises. *Rude pravo* noted (on 25 June) that the payment of Party dues had declined sharply during the year. It was known from various sources that comrades were giving up their Party cards by the thousands. Moreover, meetings were not being called and there was a general lack of interest in Party activity. As for the enterprises, the situation was no better. The Praesidium of the Prague Municipal Committee, now entirely in the hands of newly appointed hardliners, had been compelled to deal with strikes in at least five Prague enterprises. The Czech Students' Union had been dissolved. Among teaching staff at the universities and in schools in general, 'right-wing and nationalist elements' were suspended.

While all this was going on, the economy was neglected as it had been ever since the Soviet invasion and its state became increasingly critical. Husak acknowledged this although he himself



had little taste for, or knowledge of, economic affairs. Speaking in July in the Silesian basin of Ostrava where the working population had always been in favour of the Dubcek experiment, the First Secretary deplored the lack of discipline in Czechoslovak industry, and even cited the economic reforms carried out in East Germany since 1961 as an example for Czechoslovakia to follow. Strougal, too, spoke, and said that prices would have to be revised. This naturally meant that the prices would rise – which they did a few weeks later. Since a purge of Dubcek supporters was going on in the lower and middle ranks of the Party, it was clearly only a question of time before it reached the higher and top Party bodies. As if in preparation for this move, Husak declared at the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the foundation of People's Poland in Warsaw (on 21 July): that 'right-wing opportunists and directly anti-socialist forces' strove in Czechoslovakia for a 'reversal of power-political relations'. He stated that the conclusions of many meetings and consultations with the other 'fraternal parties' had not been given due consideration and that, in some instances, the Dubcek leadership had adopted attitudes 'not in keeping either with the class and international interest of our Party and society or of the socialist camp as a whole'.

As the first anniversary of the invasion drew nearer, the hardliners were preparing the ground for a final political statement on the events which had led to the invasion. Moreover, as expected, Alexander Dubcek, Josef Smrkovsky, and Cestmir Cisar were called upon for the first time, by name, to indulge in self-criticism and explain their part in the Prague Spring. According to *Rude pravo* of 22 July, this demand had been raised at a meeting in a north-western Bohemian town, attended, as if by chance, by readers of the Party daily. It was declared at the meeting that Gustav Husak should not have to bear the whole burden of rectifying mistakes, and that Dubcek, Smrkovsky, Cisar and 'others' should speak out frankly about the post-January period.

Such was the atmosphere as the anniversary of the invasion drew near; anxiety rose and the attacks became sharper against those prominent reformists who were still part of the Czechoslovak Party leadership, although their influence had declined and they had kept silent throughout the vicious campaigns directed against

them. It became obvious that Moscow demanded some kind of declaration to the effect that the invasion was both necessary and correct.

It was thus no surprise when, without any prior announcement, Husak and President Svoboda flew to Sinferopol in the Crimea for a 'vacation'. There they were awaited by their Soviet counterparts Brezhnev and Podgorny. It was later said that the Czechoslovaks had arrived in the Crimea at the invitation of the Central Committee of the Soviet Party and that the Czechoslovak Party Secretary, Alois Indra, and the Czechoslovak Ambassador in Moscow, Vladimir Koucky, were with the group that welcomed them. It was certain that the Soviet leaders wanted to know at first hand what precautions had been taken in Czechoslovakia with regard to the approaching anniversary of the invasion. Probably the issue of the legitimacy of the invasion was also raised.

It was later known that the top Soviet and Czech leaders had reached a basic agreement : to leave the maintenance of order during these critical days entirely in the hands of the Czechoslovaks. This served a double purpose : to free Moscow from the burden of yet another show of force in the streets of Czech cities and, secondly, to demonstrate to the population that the Husak leadership was now sole master of its house, both willing and able to preserve order and show an iron fist if necessary.

On 10 August, Svoboda and Husak returned to Prague from the Crimea. Contrary to normal practice, no official speech was made and no commentary published. The country was in a state of nervous expectation and, with the anniversary of the invasion nearing, the leadership showed increasing signs of nervousness. A number of proclamations and appeals were made, exhorting the population to refrain from any acts which might disturb the process of 'consolidation'. The State Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior claimed that there were 'many illegal leaflets and inscriptions' calling for armed action, and that the theft of weapons and ammunition had increased.

Legal proceedings had already been started in July against more than 200 alleged authors and disseminators of illegal leaflets. Finally (on 13 August), Husak himself spoke. His speech seemed an appeal to reason rather than a threat; he warned against the growing activity of the 'anti-socialist' forces and emphasized that

the Party and state had sufficient means to combat them. If these means had not yet been used, Husak added, it was not due to weakness but rather to a determination to exploit all means of persuasion first.

On Monday 19 August, the fateful week started. It was obvious to the politically and tactically experienced Czechs, both students and young workers alike, that the hardliners wanted nothing better than general disorder, street fighting and violent demonstrations, so that the threat of 'counter-revolution' might be established at last and 'victoriously crushed'. All the many leaflets circulating at that time (most of them copied in state enterprises and printing shops) warned the people precisely *against* such outbursts of passion. One circular suggested that the security forces were themselves prepared to mount a provocation (under the code name of Milan) and bring about a 'counter-revolutionary situation'. It was in the spirit of Czech tradition (and in accordance with the circumstances since no opposition planned in advance could have been put into practice) that the widely distributed appeal for *passive* resistance should be followed by the vast majority of people to mark the 'Day of Shame'. To play safe, the leadership decided to dispatch very strong units of the security, army and the People's Militia, as early as 19 August, to patrol the streets of the main Czechoslovak cities, especially Prague. The citizens were surprised and angered when they saw these heavy units, including armoured cars and tanks, blocking their streets in this operation against an unseen enemy – who could be none other than the Czechs and Slovaks themselves. On top of this, the security forces – masquerading sometimes as regular army units or using vehicles belonging to the innocent traffic police – were given orders to disperse any large gathering of people however peaceful. In such conditions skirmishes and fights were inevitable from the start and were obviously desired by the extremists in the Party.

On the morning of 19 August, Svoboda and Husak addressed a final warning to the people. The First Secretary sharply attacked what he called 'illegal opposition' and threatened all such elements with the sternest reprisals. On the same day, however, the first clashes occurred in Prague's Wenceslas Square. The first incident was a scuffle between police and some citizens who wanted to place flowers by the statue of the national saint.

In the evening, larger crowds assembled in the square and were attacked in a most brutal manner by the police (according to the doctors who treated the wounded, the special security men were drugged) who used truncheons and tear-gas bombs. Little wonder that the situation deteriorated rapidly, and that Czechoslovakia and the world at large witnessed what was to be the bloody anniversary of a tragic event; all the more painful, to some observers at least, since, 'Czechs were fighting Czechs'.

There is not space to describe fully these troubled days with their dead, wounded and thousands of arrested.\* Less dramatic, yet most impressive in the political sense, was the peaceful demonstration of discontent in which practically the entire population of the Republic took part on the 'Day of Shame'. In spite of a massive intimidation campaign, people managed to demonstrate silently that they were not reconciled with the Soviet-led invasion and the pro-Soviet puppet regime. Public transport ran practically empty, people walked to work, little shopping was done, cinemas and restaurants were deserted, newspaper sales were almost nil and people wore dark clothing. Memorials to victims of the invasion were covered with flowers. At noon, traffic stopped in the major cities, car horns blared out, pedestrians stood still or stamped loudly on the pavements. The demonstrations lasted about five minutes; factory sirens were heard and cars switched their lights on.

The crisis then reached its pitch in Prague. For at mid-day thousands of Prague factory workers began to march from the outskirts to the centre of the capital. The security forces were given strict orders to prevent the workers from joining the crowds in Wenceslas Square, which had by then grown to some fifty or sixty thousand people. An hour later, the crowd had probably doubled. From a helicopter hovering over the square orders were given for a frontal attack on the demonstrators. The enraged security forces obeyed the order with unheard-of brutality and the fleeing crowd responded with shouts of 'Gestapo' or 'Gustapo!' (an allusion to Husak's first name). At the same time, the streets leading to the centre of Prague were sealed off to prevent the workers from getting in. In this way, the danger of a direct

\*The Federal Ministry of the Interior reported that 3,690 persons were detained.

clash between the police and the workers was avoided, to the great relief of Party leaders.

Late at night, on 21 August, the Praesidium met once again to assess the situation. They decided to play safe and claim a 'great victory' over 'hostile and counter-revolutionary forces'. On the following day the mass media broadcast the Praesidium's sincere thanks to the police, army and militia for having successfully dealt with a 'complicated situation'. Later, Prague Radio's new star commentator, a militant pro-Soviet, masquerading under the pseudonym of Jiri Smrcina, introduced the propaganda line to be followed for many days after: the demonstrations had proved that the slogan 'socialism with a human face' was only a pretext for the gradual disruption of socialism as such; the riots had 'unmasked the true intentions of the rightist and anti-socialist forces. . . Now it was known what would have happened a year ago had there been no assistance from the socialist countries. . . These demonstrations had tolled the knell of the rightist and counter-revolutionary forces in the country.'

In the evening hours of 22 August, special legal measures were hurriedly passed by the Federal Assembly's Praesidium. They were drastic measures, strongly reminiscent of the illegal practices of the fifties. In particular, they specified that legal proceedings (notably against those suspected of 'anti-socialist agitation') could be based on accusations by the police, who would, in future, have the right in such circumstances to detain a suspect for three weeks. The public prosecutor's address was no longer necessary. Lawyers could assist their clients only at the actual trial, not before.

A 'witch hunt' also began at the highest level in the Party. It developed in accordance with a plan worked out by the Central Committee's Department of Ideology and rested on the gradual publication of 'documents' concerning the events leading to the invasion as well as its aftermath, and which would attribute to the reformist leadership various shortcomings ranging from 'negligence' and 'weakness' to outright treason. Consequently, *Rude pravo* and *Tribuna* published a series of 'revelations' whose only remarkable feature was that nothing remarkable was revealed. Kolder, Bilak, Piller, Svestka and others gave their version of 'the events', trying to prove that the invasion could have been forestalled if only Dubcek, Kriegel,

Smrkovsky and Cisar had taken Soviet warnings seriously. They also claimed that Dubcek had not disclosed certain documents (such as the Soviet Politburo letter of 19 August 1968) to other Praesidium members, that the Minister of the Interior, J. Pavel, had been aware of the growing dangers of counter-revolution in the country but had not done anything about it, and so on. At the same time a fresh look at the various conferences from Dresden to Bratislava was to establish 'the fact' that the Soviet Union and her allies had been rightly worried about developments in Czechoslovakia and that armed intervention had not come as a surprise to the Dubcek leadership since this possibility had been mentioned by the Soviets both at Cierna and Bratislava. It is interesting to note that one of the directives to the press, worked out some time at the end of July 1969, already specified that in the week between 22 August and 1 September, the Czechoslovak information media 'should stress the positive results of the security measures taken against anti-socialist elements' during the period of the anniversary of the invasion.

The purpose of this exercise was not, of course, to establish historical truth but to prepare for a final settling of accounts with such deviationists as Smrkovsky, Pavel, Prchlik and Dubcek himself. This was to be done, and the various punishments meted out, at a series of Praesidium sessions early in September, and to be approved (if possible unanimously) at a Central Committee plenum planned for mid-September. The operation proved more difficult than originally foreseen. The first three weeks of September 1969 saw feverish activity throughout the Party apparatus and angry debates in the Praesidium. Once again, personal relations and the human element played a major role in what developed into another power struggle within the governing elite, not unlike the one which raged at the time of Novotny's fall and which is described in the introductory part of this book.

After the bloody events of the anniversary and in the face of mounting criticism in the Party press and at Party meetings (all on instructions from the centre), the heroes of the Prague Spring remained silent and continued to do so throughout the defamatory campaign waged against them. This situation followed a pattern set in the Stalinist era: the accused had no

right to defend himself unless he was willing to indulge in grotesque self-criticism. There were increasing signs, however, that Dubcek and Smrkovsky, only to mention the two top leaders, were not willing to take part in such humiliating spectacles. Faced with this unforeseen obstacle, the hardliners became more enraged and more insistent: speak out, explain, confess! they cried ever louder at the reformists.

The campaign was in full swing but far from its climax by the end of August, which marked the 25th anniversary of the wartime (1944) Slovak National Uprising against the Germans. The two Dubcek brothers had taken an active part in it, and one of them had laid down his life in this struggle for liberation. It was impossible to ignore the other brother at the official celebrations in the Slovak town of Banska Bystrica where (on 28 August) the entire hierarchy of the Czechoslovak Communist Party had gathered. But the immense crowd fastened its attention on a single man, as he stood slightly aside from the others, a little sad, a little self-conscious: Alexander Dubcek. And although none of the official speakers included Dubcek's name among the guests, wherever he went he was greeted by the people who took his hand and patted him on the shoulder. The lonely hero's self-confidence, badly shattered, began to reassert itself. Soon after these celebrations, the former First Secretary made a tour of the country, visited his constituency in Slovakia – and became aware of the enormous popularity he still commanded. 'We are still behind you,' he was told on innumerable occasions, amid demonstrations of warm devotion. It is thought to be during this time that Dubcek took his firm decision not to give in but to defend his conception of socialism with a human face.

In the first week of September, at a session of the Party Praesidium, Dubcek made what was for him an unusually fighting speech. He declared that a full-scale campaign, composed of inaccuracies and outright lies, had been launched against him in the Party and its press. This was undermining his position as a Praesidium member, as Chairman of the Federal Assembly, and as member of the Central Committee; although the Party authorities had stated that 'a profound analysis' of the 1968 events had to be made before the question of responsibility for the mistakes committed by the Dubcek leadership could be decided upon, a hate-campaign had been started,

bearing all the ugly signs of times which everybody believed belonged to the past. Dubcek requested that these attacks in the press be stopped – after all, as he pointed out, he had done as much in periods of crisis when other comrades had been criticized or attacked. Colotka, a Husak man, rejected Dubcek's demand. He said that 'the right opportunist conspiracy in the Party had to be unmasked on all levels, that nobody should escape, especially those who were at the head of it'. With the support of Bilak and others, Colotka maintained that there could be 'no half-way solutions'. But Dubcek was not to be frightened. According to the minutes of this particular meeting,

. . . comrade Dubcek became very angry, pounded his fist on the table and once again asked to speak. Using his own documents as evidence, comrade Dubcek recalled the support he had received in the past from those comrades who were now criticizing him. He recalled that comrade Indra had warned him early in 1968 not to trust comrade Cernik and had asked him to give the premiership to him rather than to Cernik. He reminded comrade Bilak of the latter's assurances of loyalty to him personally, and of the fact that comrade Bilak had warned him repeatedly against comrade Husak who, he insisted, should not be given any top political post in the Party leadership. Comrade Dubcek then quoted the minutes of a conversation he had had with comrade Husak in August 1968. According to comrade Dubcek, comrade Husak had deplored the slow process of liberalization in Slovakia, which had been purposely slowed down by comrade Bilak who, in the opinion of comrade Husak, should be eliminated from political work.

According to the minutes of this meeting, Dubcek resolutely refused to perform self-criticism, then or later, and by recalling incidents such as those above, he indirectly suggested that the men who demanded his political assassination had not the least right, moral or otherwise, to do so. A free-for-all ensued, with the accused trying not only to defend themselves but also to involve others in various unsavoury affairs.\*

Husak requested his secretariat to take notes of the incidents cited – they might come in handy later. The subsequent sessions

\*There was the affair of the private cars. As of 22 September 1969, cars imported from the West were put on the free market at double the price of those on the controlled market. (There was an acute shortage of cars in



of the Praesidium did not bring the desired results either, and therefore the Central Committee's plenary session had to be postponed. More important, Dubcek's speech and the accusations and counter-accusations that followed resulted in significant differences among the hardliners, thus weakening their position. New allegiances were formed, others in the Party elite dissolved, so that it was often impossible to have a concise picture of this jockeying for positions.

The reformists used this lack of unity skilfully by leaking certain documents to the western press which were bound to embarrass some of the hardliners. For example, a letter addressed to President Svoboda on 25 August 1968 (when the President was negotiating in Moscow in circumstances now known to all) calling on him to remain firm was published on the eve of the plenum in the Paris review *Svedectvi* and in the West German magazine *Der Spiegel*. The important point was that this document, stressing the illegality of the invasion, was signed by Lubomir Strougal on behalf of the Czechoslovak government. It is significant that Strougal, who ranked among the most militant revanchists, eventually lost his powerful position in the Party leadership. The hardliners, Indra and Svestka, surprised other hardliners by a sudden switch to a centrist position on the question of the 'guilt' of Dubcek and others. In turn, the extreme conservatives, and especially the third-rate commentators who had taken over the press, radio and television, felt isolated. This feeling was accentuated by the hatred the population felt for these supporters of the regime.\* The uncertainty was heightened by Moscow's real or simulated disinterest in this inner-party struggle.

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Czechoslovakia; by the end of 1968, 290,000 people were waiting for the delivery of cars; some of them had been on the list for several years.) In addition, a high tax was imposed on the re-sale of used cars. The Party Praesidium, Secretariat and some Central Committee members, who knew of these increases in advance, sold their old cars in time at good prices without paying the re-sale tax, and acquired bonds enabling them to buy new cars at the old rates. One thousand bonds were thus distributed to Party officials, including all members of the Praesidium with the exception of Husak. The latter insisted, when the scandal broke out early in September, that all cars thus acquired should be returned without refund. However, Secretary Strougal persuaded Husak that as First Secretary he would make enemies of hundreds of his supporters in the Party apparatus. Finally, it was decided that they should pay the difference between the old and the new price.

At about this time, a group of Czechoslovak intellectuals issued a new Two Thousand Words manifesto, 'the ten points', widely distributed in Czechoslovakia and in the West.† This manifesto made a most critical assessment of the first year of the country's occupation and appealed to the workers as the only organized and least vulnerable social class, not to support, or even to work for, the present regime of repression.

In this atmosphere, and after a series of last-minute Praesidium sessions at which the 'realists' failed to persuade Dubcek to perform the rite of self-criticism (this in turn strengthened Smrkovsky, Prchlik, Slavik, Hubl and other Central Committee members in their decision not to 'confess'), the Central Committee plenum finally met in strict secrecy in Prague, on 24–25 September. The session was stormy and developed along the three main lines which had predominated in the Praesidium meetings, with the ultras demanding that exemplary punishments be meted out to the 'right opportunist forces', the realists steering a middle-course but demanding a purge throughout the Party from the centre down to basic organizations, and with the reformists, though having admitted certain mistakes, denying vehemently that they had acted against the interests of the Party as rightist-opportunists or perhaps even as traitors. There were also some conspicuous silences – Alois Indra, for example, did not speak in the debate, saving his judgements for some later occasion.

Dubcek refuted accusations that he had kept to himself information concerning the Soviets' intentions. He stated again, offering proof of the fact, that Moscow had not only sent letters on 17 and 19 August but that he had received similar missives every two or three days. He insisted furthermore that the Soviet notes during the period immediately before the invasion did not contain any 'last warning' as his accusers would have it believed. Janos Kadar, the Hungarian leader whom Dubcek

\*Some of them had reason to fear for their personal safety. The most radical among them wrote and spoke under pen names, and they carefully avoided showing their faces on television screens lest they be later recognized. Indra's daughter was beaten up by her schoolmates. The new directors of the mass media were unable to recruit personnel. A story in Prague had it that a bank teller finally consented to work as a television announcer; however, he had to be turned down because due to long-time habit, he wet his fingers whenever he had to turn a page.

†For full text see *Le Monde*, 26 September 1969.

had met at Komarno on 17 August, had not let him know either that an invasion threatened in the immediate future. Dubcek added: 'Personally, I did not exclude the possibility of an invasion, but frankly I never believed in it.' The former First Secretary protested that it had been made impossible to defend himself against the public attacks made against him. He concluded by warning his successor Gustav Husak that the latter's attitude to 'consolidation' would not fail to lead the Party into 'isolation and bankruptcy'.

Cerny and Slavik stressed the 'unprecedented unity of the people and the Party' achieved during the 'Prague Spring', destroyed for ever by the Soviet intervention. (Slavik did not hesitate to use this term which had since 21 August 1969 been replaced by 'entry' of the allied troops.) He also added a few comments on the fears aroused among the general public by the new leadership's decision to suspend the formation of workers' councils.

The scenario for the plenary session worked out by the hardliners could not be put fully into practice. In view of this, it was decided (contrary to Party statutes) that the plenum should also be attended by members of the Party Control Commission, by *apparatchiks* from regional, district and two Party committees, sprinkled with a choice selection of hardliners from the army, the security police, the state prosecution and courts, not to mention extremists from the so-called mass organizations and the Party press. This crowd provided the hysterical, noisy background necessary to induce the proper atmosphere for an inquisition tribunal. For that is indeed what it was. The heroes of the Prague Spring were to be humiliated and defamed, their followers intimidated. The results were a foregone conclusion. By a majority of votes (therefore not unanimously), General Vaclav Prchlik,\* Party secretary Vaclav Slavik and Dr Alfred Cerny, an official of the regional committee in southern Moravia, were expelled from the Party. Six Central Committee members and one candidate member were expelled from that body, among them Smrkovsky, Hubl, Mlynar, and former Foreign Minister Jiri Hajek. In the case of Smrkovsky and Maria Mikova, the Central Committee 'directed communist deputies in the Federal

\*Prchlik's immunity as a member of Parliament was lifted a few days later and criminal proceedings were initiated.

Assembly and in the House of the People to recall them from their functions as representatives'. Nineteen Central Committee members were 'relieved of their functions as Central Committee members at their own request', among them such well-known personalities of the Prague Spring as Spacek, Simon, Martin Vaculik, Hrdinova and two members of the Academy of Sciences, Professors Malek and Sorm. Finally, Alexander Dubcek was dismissed from the Praesidium and, once again, communist deputies were ordered to dismiss him from his functions as a representative of the people in Parliament.

It was clear to everyone familiar with the irresistible mechanism of repression in a totalitarian regime, that punishment 'along Party lines', following an upheaval of such magnitude as in this particular case, could hardly be the end of the affair. Immediately after the publication of the verdicts, the hardliners were clearly disappointed. Some members of the Central Committee (which had been strengthened by such new hardline acquisitions as Auersperg, Fojtik and Chnoupek) expressed their 'sorrow' over Dubcek's unwillingness to confess his mistakes fully. Others threatened in violent outbursts, the 'beginning of a phase of the political liquidation and total destruction of rightist forces' in the Party.

The first arrests were made, in secret : Rudolf Battek, a member of the Czech National Council, was detained for having written a paper criticizing the Party. Two well-known journalists, Ludek Pachmann and Vladimir Skutina, the novelist Ota Filip, the Marxist historian Jan Tesar (to name just those known for their active part in the reformist movement) were put in prison. With the exception of Filip and Skutina, one of the detained had a trial although by September 1970 they had spent over a year in jail. All were finally released without trial or explanation.

An ominous note was struck by Husak in his report to the Central Committee when he accused the Dubcek leadership of 'disrupting the Czechoslovak national economy, creating anarchy in it, causing a rise in the price of consumers' goods, and deepening economic demoralization to an extent never known before'. The manoeuvre was clear and its aim twofold: to put the responsibility for the catastrophic economic situation of the country (which had its origins well back in the Novotny era) on the reformists, who would then also be blamed for the most

unpopular economic restrictions yet to come; secondly to prepare for possible trials against them on grounds of economic sabotage.

The Central Committee then annulled the resolution of the Praesidium condemning the entry of the Warsaw Pact troops during the night of 21 August 1968 (c.f. the text of the resolution, p. 100) on consideration of its 'erroneous and non-Marxist' character, for the 'allied troops' entry into Czechoslovakia in the situation pertaining in the summer of 1968 had been motivated by the need to defend socialism in Czechoslovakia against the anti-socialist and counter-revolutionary forces of the right and in the interests of the security of the socialist camp and the communist and workers' movement. It was not in any way an act of aggression against the people neither was there any question of an occupation of Czechoslovak territory or of the suppression of liberty or the socialist system.'

In addition, it annulled the decision of 19 July 1968 refusing to take part in the Warsaw conference, a resolution 'adopted under psychological and moral pressures from the right'. Finally the Central Committee refused to recognize the 'so-called Vysocany Congress' held on 22 August 1968 and declared 'its documents and conclusions illegal and null.

Thus the long-prepared, 'historic' Central Committee plenum of September 1969 ended with a big bang, but was of very little substance. For, as the *Guardian* commented (on 30 September), 'the changes in Czechoslovakia are by nature negative . . . they bring together, if one is to go by the character of the changes at the top, an unstable collection of dogmatists, time-servers, opportunists. . . Czechoslovakia is indeed back where it started, and neither Prague nor Moscow has yet shown a credible way forward.'\*

Indeed, not a single *real* issue had been solved, not one of the burning problems of Czechoslovak society had been tackled, either in the political sphere proper, in the economy, the trade unions,

\*One of these time-servers, the new Czech Minister of Education, Jaromir Hrbek, was to become famous with his circular of 16 September 1969, calling on all heads of Czechoslovak institutes of secondary education and deans of faculties to join in a vast operation of informing on people. He called for investigations of teachers' and students' attitudes and of their political activities. Hrbek added in another circular that the answers might be written in ink or in pencil and that 'spelling mistakes will not be taken into account for those who have not received sufficient instruction'.

the youth organizations or anywhere else. The abyss between the people and the Party leadership could hardly have been deeper. The population took the changes at the top with a most eloquent, monumental silence. The young generation could not have cared less. Yet the struggle within the power elite was far from closed. In the apparatus intrigues and uncertainty were the order of the day. In the mass communication media a handful of Party hacks became ever more hysterical and revenge-thirsty as their isolation grew. And the fear of those in power grew also. On 9 October 1969, the authorities closed the frontiers to all private travel – that is in one direction only: out of the country. It seemed as if the entire nation was being plunged into dark isolation.

The inevitable course of events could be – at best – only slowed down. On 15 December 1969, it was announced that President Svoboda had nominated Alexander Dubcek as Czechoslovak Ambassador to Ankara. The hastily manufactured diplomat, however, did not leave for his new post until five weeks later, a few days before the opening of the 28 January 1970 Central Committee plenum. The hardliners were ready to accept Dubcek's gilded exile (after all, the nomination was approved in Moscow), but in return they were keen to obtain a public and thorough self-criticism from the former First Secretary. Once again, they were to be disappointed. Whatever might be said about Alexander Dubcek, he constantly refused this kind of self-humiliation.

The new ambassador left for Turkey (his three sons had to remain in Czechoslovakia), and on the very first day of its session the Central Committee 'accepted the resignation' of Alexander Dubcek from that body. He had lost his last Party office. The appropriate action came from the Praesidium.

There were other significant personnel changes both in the Party and in the government. It was evident that the bell had tolled for those comrades who had tried to save their political skins by betraying Dubcek. Oldrich Cernik lost both his Party Praesidium membership and the office of Prime Minister. The Party Praesidium evicted Stefan Sadovsky – the Russians had not forgotten his mission during the Cierna negotiations – and Karel Polacek who had since 1967 displayed a variety of faces from 'liberal' to 'realistic'. Over thirty Central Committee members, all

Dubcek supporters, were expelled or resigned, either at the September 1969 or at the January 1970 Central Committee sessions. A number of arrests were made at that time, notably among Prague university students. All this was evidently considered unsatisfactory and Interior Minister Jan Pelnar was discharged during the January reshuffle and the job was entrusted to Radko Kaska, a hardliner who was little known but very much to Soviet liking.

The January plenum decided further on a vast cleansing operation in the form of an exchange of Party cards. At the close of this campaign Party membership had dropped by at least 300,000 (approaching the figure the Soviets had suggested as early as August 1968). A mass purge swept Czechoslovak schools and universities. Writers' and artists' unions were either dissolved or totally isolated. 'Command economy' and rigidly centralized planning – in spite of disastrous results – were again the order of the day. Trade unions became once more transmission belts for the Party. In the second week of March, the rest of the most prominent 'men of the Prague Spring' were expelled from the Party; among them Smrkovsky, Spacek, Mlynar, Cisar, Kaplan, Mikova, Boruvka and Vodslon. On 21 March 1970, *Rude pravo* revealed that the Party membership of Alexander Dubcek had been suspended 'pending an investigation into his earlier activities'.

Almost unnoticed, the 'temporary' stationing of Soviet troops on Czechoslovak territory transformed itself into a permanent state. A new Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty was signed on 9 May 1970 (although the preceding one was valid until 1983) which, it was claimed, 'conformed to the higher level of Soviet-Czechoslovak fraternal relations in the postwar period'.

To mark the occasion, a top-level Soviet Party and government delegation, headed by Brezhnev himself, arrived in the Czech capital early in May. Surrounded by extreme security precautions and in the isolation of Prague Castle, the Soviet Party Secretary made a violent and ominous attack on Dubcek and his supporters – 'people who had orally sworn loyalty to socialist ideas, but in practice . . . had swerved away from socialism and had been associating themselves with foreign imperialist circles, in fact fulfilling their will'.

Encouraged by Brezhnev to purge the Czech Party ranks of

all revisionists and opportunists, the domestic hardliners stepped up their offensive. Hardly an hour passed on radio and television without an attack, a sneer, a warning being aimed at 'enemies of socialism'; the press also contributed its share to the hysterical onslaught. In mid-May, Prague television surpassed itself by using what it considered compromising tape recordings secured from a listening device which the state police had mounted in the apartment of a university professor. The purpose of this exercise (since repeated several times), was to prove that the promoters of 'socialism with a human face' were nothing but a bunch of cynics and traitors.

On 30 May 1970, Dubcek was recalled from Ankara; he returned by devious ways to Bratislava – and disappeared. Czechoslovak information media maintained a stubborn silence; officials declined to confirm or to deny that he had indeed come back home. Later he was said to be at the bedside of his ailing mother and scheduled to return to Turkey. Three weeks later (on 24 June) Radio Prague broke its silence to announce that the President of the Republic had recalled Alexander Dubcek from his post as ambassador and had 'assigned other duties to him'.

The three weeks missing from the tumultuous life of the hero of the Prague Spring were spent in breaking Alexander Dubcek. A special Party commission, headed by one of the most vicious conservatives, Vilem Novy, had been sitting in secret for days. It tried hard, to say the least, to make the former First Secretary Alexander Dubcek confess that he

1. Failed to implement the political line of the (June 1966) 13th C.P.C.S. Congress;
2. Abandoned the basic postulates of the January 1968 C.P.C.S. C.C. Plenum;
3. Was responsible for the ideological and organizational disruption of the Party, which, under his leadership, became an 'opportunist party of a social-democratic type';
4. Was responsible for the free dissemination of 'revisionist and opportunist theories and bourgeois propaganda' by mass communication media and part of the Party press;
5. Tolerated the defamation of the Party, its history, and the entire period of socialist construction;



6. Instead of fighting 'anti-socialist and rightist-opportunist forces', he became an 'ideological defeatist';
7. Gradually parted with the Party and 'became one of the representatives of rightist opportunist policy';
8. Led society to destruction and caused heavy damage to the economy;
9. Was responsible for the disruption of relations with the communist parties of the 'fraternal socialist countries';
10. Tolerated the misuse of his name by 'anti-Communist' forces abroad and 'counter-revolutionary' elements at home;
11. Still adhered to his anti-Party positions.

Dubcek was asked to sign on the dotted line: the confession was badly needed for a variety of reasons but primarily to weaken Dubcek's popularity with the people.\* Moreover, the forthcoming June Central Committee plenary session was, on the basis of this confession, to deliver a final blow to the Prague Spring. However, Dubcek did not budge. He refused to perform self-criticism on any of the eleven points. He collapsed twice and had to be treated in the Prague Sanops sanatorium. The session of the Central Committee had to be twice postponed. And when it finally convened on 25 June 1970, Dubcek rounded on his attackers by dispatching a 'personal declaration' to the Central Committee (never, of course, made public). He not only defended his 1968 reform policy but concluded on a defiant note: the real counter-revolution did not materialize during the Prague Spring but was in the making at that very moment, under Husak.

Without much further discussion, Alexander Dubcek was expelled from the Party he had served for thirty-one years. Scores of his supporters in the Central Committee lost their membership in this body and subsequently their Party cards. Others, notably Oldrich Cernik, who had earlier denounced Dubcek to save their own skins, were also dropped.

After his expulsion, Dubcek lived quietly in his modest house in Bratislava, relaxed, and happy that his trials were over, receiving a handful of close friends and refusing to give interviews. The hate campaign against him was stepped up. A huge \*In a long article *Rude pravo* (on 16 July 1970) admitted: 'The legend about Alexander Dubcek . . . has deeply embedded itself in the minds of a part of our population, even among communists. It has remained alive not merely in our country alone; many progressive people in the capitalist countries have succumbed to it as well.'

inscription in the Slovak town of Trnava proclaimed: 'Death to Dubcek!'

Whatever his final fate, Alexander Dubcek will be remembered as a communist who did not recant. And while history and historians are likely to find many faults, weaknesses and inconsistencies in the Dubcek experiment of 1968, the event will nevertheless be remembered as one of the milestones on the path of man's unending search for liberty.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE DUBCEK EXPERIMENT: A POST-MORTEM

Our ideas are not anti-Party . . . nor anti-socialist. . . We have no reason to take up anti-Soviet standpoints. The only thing we oppose in our relations with the Soviets is their brutal manner of interfering in the sovereign matters of other countries.

From the 'Ten Points' Manifesto distributed clandestinely on the occasion of the first anniversary of the invasion.

THE review of Czechoslovak developments between January 1968 and the autumn of 1970 attempted in this book lends itself to a number of interpretations and conclusions. Although they cannot be final (the process still continues), overall answers may be given to two basic questions: first, what was the nature of the Czechoslovak experiment and, second, why did the Soviet Union have to put an end to it in the manner it did?

In the period between January and August 1968, a memorable attempt was made to transform or at least modify a communist state in Eastern Europe. It was the very nature of this attempt – to rid an authoritarian regime of its most regressive, undemocratic features – which attracted the attention and sympathies of millions both in the East and the West.

All those who followed the Prague Spring during the eight months of its existence, and the partial restoration of political and civil rights after two decades of arbitrary rule, could not but feel disillusioned and sad when the experiment failed. This sadness was quite natural, for the efforts of the Dubcek team, and especially of the intellectuals, of the students, of two generations of disillusioned communists and of a nation in despair, were all part of a struggle for more liberty, for human dignity and justice for all.

Furthermore, though there have been other similar attempts at liberalizing a single-party system in other communist countries, the issues have never before been so clearly stated in ethical and political terms, nor so keenly analysed and brilliantly formulated as in Prague. The reformists were often the very people who had, a decade or so previously, proudly ranked themselves among the founders of the very society which they now wanted to rebuild and reshape. They did not lack spirit, skill or courage. They could count on the support of almost the entire population. Still, the question arises whether they would have been able to bring their efforts to a fruitful and lasting conclusion given the opportunity, i.e. if the Prague Spring had not been cut short by a military intervention from outside.

The question is well founded. It touches on a number of more general problems concerning the structure of a basically totalitarian regime and the possibility of its gradual, non-violent democratization. The signatories of the 'Ten Points' Manifesto (a most devoted and ambitious group of reformists) stated:

The Government and the Communist Party, which were undergoing a complete regeneration, were on the way to proving that socialism could give men all the traditional liberties acquired by previous revolutions, and using these as a starting-point could then build a society which would be more highly developed both economically and morally.

Was it really possible? Our account has shown that what started as a rather uninspiring power-struggle in the top elite structure of the Party soon developed into a social and political movement of the first order. Once the possibility of putting twenty years of communism on trial had arisen, the pronouncement of the final verdict could no longer be prevented. This verdict was an unambiguous rejection of the totalitarian state. However, one question led to another, one unmasked lie to yet another truth. Finally, it became almost impossible to patch up a political structure with such obviously rotten foundations. Dubcek, Smrkovsky, Kriegel and the other Party reformists unwittingly opened the Pandora's box of the people's long-suppressed national and political desires. They were faced with a socio-political explosion. Although they feared it, they were at the same time irresistibly attracted to it since, for the first time, they could be sure of

the support of a true majority of the people – *provided* that they were able and willing to lead the process of liberalization and democratization to its conclusion.

The ability and will to do this were necessarily limited by circumstances beyond the control, sometimes even beyond the understanding, of the leading reformists. They had all been through the same school, brought up in the ideology of a past century, which lacked sense and appeal in times so radically changed from those of Marx and Lenin. They tried to reform a system paralysed by the rigid application of this ideology, in the name of the very same doctrine which had brought about the paralysis in the first place. They attempted to cure the effects rather than the causes of the disease. And, indeed, they could hardly have done otherwise. Their sole political experience had been gained in the Party *apparatus*, a petrified and highly arbitrary body. Yet this was the reformists' only frame of reference. Consequently, wherever they turned, they banged their heads against the four walls of this out-dated structure, dragging behind them an ideology hopelessly fossilized in some respects, and totally discredited by its practical application in others. Indeed, there were possibilities of reform – up to a point. Once this point had been reached – and there were differences among the reformists themselves as to where such a demarcation line was to be drawn – only two solutions were left.

One was to limit, to trim and control from above all the changes initiated by the reformists themselves. This would finally, however, have raised serious doubts as to the true intention of this governing minority which had originally proposed to limit its own power for the benefit of the majority. Such trimmings of promised liberties would necessarily lead to an intensification of the struggle on the part of that majority, and to loss of confidence in, and support of, the reformers, and to a sharpening of social and political contradictions. Such developments could not be tolerated for long by any self-esteeming Marxist-Leninist movement. In such a situation the Party leadership would have felt compelled to opt for a solution which would necessarily have been close to that proposed by Husak when he took over from Dubcek and which, incidentally, had been recommended by the 'realists' throughout the Prague Spring.

The other solution possible was for Dubcek and his team to

pursue their programme of liberalization and democratization right to the end – which would have led them to create an open society and build up a system which would be really parliamentary, in other words a system contradictory to the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism as it is applied today in communist countries. If this had happened it is very doubtful whether Dubcek's team would have retained a monopoly of power for very long, even a modified one as planned in the April 1968 Action Programme.

This, broadly speaking, was the basic dilemma facing the Czechoslovak communist reform movement from the very beginning and from which its numerous inconsistencies sprang. The reformers tried to distribute certain fundamental civic and political rights following a sort of rationing system; they wanted to ration liberty. This is obviously a tricky business, as it is difficult, if not impossible, to change the authoritarian nature of a system which is fundamentally totalitarian just as it is to convince people (as Orwell put it) that all men are equal but some are more equal than others. As Raymond Aron noted: '... the essence of a single-party regime in which the state is defined by the ideology of the monopolistic party is *not* to accept *all* ideas and to prevent some ideas relating to the party from being openly debated.'\*

One of the principles which Dubcek's team had always stressed was that of the leading role of the Party. Long before threatening clouds had gathered in the Soviet skies, Dubcek himself made it quite clear that no opposition party would be allowed and above all that the Social Democratic Party could not be re-formed.†

However, one wonders how, under such conditions, a society could work in which democratic principles are freely proclaimed

\*In *Democracy and Totalitarianism*, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1969, p. 45.

†The possible competition of a re-established Czechoslovak Social-Democratic Party was always keenly feared by the reformists. Some of them were convinced that a majority of those who voted for the communists would move to the Social Democrats, leaving behind the *apparatchiks*, the Stalinists, the opportunists. This probable trend was recognized even by members of the preparatory committee who strove for a restitution of the Social-Democratic Party, at the height of the Prague Spring. They even reached the point of considering ways and means of slowing down this mass desertion of communist rank and file which might have endangered the overall liberalization process.

only to be refuted in practice and where the free play of political forces is obstructed? How would one reconcile the full liberty of the press with demands not to criticize the government and Party leadership, even less the system as such or the ideology on which it is based? And, even if such criticism were permitted, what would be the use if it could not be translated into practical political action; in other words if it could not be institutionalized into some form of independent groupings aspiring to bring about a change in the balance (or rather imbalance) of political power in the country?

One of the leading personalities among the Marxist supporters of the reformist movement was the philosopher Ivan Svitak who noted a year after the events: 'The Czechoslovak experiment was wrecked on its own paradoxes – the bizarre situation of a communist party which wanted to enter the historical scene disguised as a democratic organization. It was ship-wrecked on the naïve belief of its power elite that its opponents would consent to self-liquidation in a wave of national enthusiasm for democracy. . . The communist power elite would never have accepted conditions which would make the free play of political forces possible. It would never have given up power.\*' Dubcek and his friends believed that an outspokenly anti-liberal, doctrinaire, bureaucratic dictatorship could be *improved* upon by simply changing the people holding key jobs, possibly also by including new people and introducing limited reforms. One conclusion seems evident, however reluctant one is to accept it: the Dubcek experiment was not possible.

Paradoxically and – admittedly – hypothetically, the future of the Czechoslovak Communist Party could have been assured if the leadership had taken a risk – and lost. What would have happened if on the fateful night of 20 August 1968 (or a little earlier), the Czechoslovak armed forces had been ordered to resist the invader? The *military* result of such an uneven clash can hardly be doubted: in a few days, or probably hours, organized resistance would have been crushed. *Politically*, however, the Party, even if driven underground or otherwise persecuted, would have become the only communist party in Eastern Europe (if not anywhere) with a truly promising political future. It could

\**Suedectvi*, Paris, No. 37, September 1969.

have counted on the massive, voluntary and sometimes enthusiastic support of its former activists, its past doubters and even some of its former adversaries. This would have been so if at the decisive moment Dubcek's Party had thrown its lot in with the people against the invader, if it had taken its stand on the side of wounded national pride rather than have been guided by phony considerations of 'proletarian internationalism' – in short, if it had opted for an uneven struggle for independence rather than for shameful capitulation. A capitulation which in the end did not save anything but eventually returned to power the selfish and incompetent bureaucrats against whom the reformists had revolted in January 1968. Had they acted differently the persecution of the reformists might have been less drastic; the Soviets have often shown signs of respect for those who dared to resist them, whether they were Finns, Yugoslavs or Albanians.

This question is not raised here in order to indulge in inconclusive speculation as to what might have happened if . . . but to point out an issue which has been discussed with passion by the man in the street as well as by the intellectuals\* in Czechoslovakia ever since the unopposed invasion, which wounded the Czechs and Slovaks so keenly.

The subject is far from new. The Czech-born historian Z. A. B. Zeman has described the ever re-occurring 'Czech dilemma' (to defend one's own country in the face of overwhelming forces, or to capitulate) as a

crucial question for the Czechs because in this respect they deepen their choicest inferiority complex. On two occasions (in 1938 and in 1968) in the last thirty years they have saved up for sophisticated military equipment and kept their troops polishing their buttons and boots, like good soldiers. On two occasions, the troops and the gear have remained confined to their barracks, garages, and hangars. The spotless army has had no opportunity to get soiled.†

This traumatic national experience is almost certain to reassert itself sooner or later and in a way which may surprise us by its violence. The question is not merely a historical one. The Soviet-led invasion brought about an upsurge of nationalism to an extent

\*The 'Ten Points' Manifesto, for example, touched upon the problem by stating that Czechoslovakia had 'an army which never shoots at the right moment'.

†'Prague: Spring and Fall', *Encounter*, London, No. 4, October 1969.



unknown in this pragmatic country. This nationalism is now almost exclusively fed by hatred of the Russians and their collaborators. This, coupled with a deep feeling of guilt rising from a number of national capitulations in Czech history, represents a dangerous and not too noble phenomenon. Nevertheless it is here to stay for a long time, and there are good reasons for it.

Without a doubt the young generation of Czechs and Slovaks, students and working youth alike, are the mainspring in this explosive situation. It is worth while to consider briefly its past history and future prospects. For twenty years (that is, ever since this generation was born) the country and the regime proved mean foster parents. As children of the heroic Stalinist times, they were lied to about practically everything, at school, in the Pioneer organization, later in the unified communist youth movement and in the Party itself. In their bewilderment at the eye-hitting discrepancies between ideology and reality, they turned to their parents for explanation. What did they find? More often than not a weak and embarrassed father who, out of fear that the child would get the whole family into trouble, parroted worn-out clichés in an unconvincing way. The mother, who used to take the child to the state nursery before rushing to work herself, had little time for contemplation; in the dark dawn hours she was busy shopping, cooking and cleaning in a society of eternal shortages. So the son turned into a young man of seventeen only to be told repeatedly by those in power that he was a good-for-nothing, a long-haired lout without ideals or an honourable class-conscious future. Nobody gave him anything free, least of all this model society of socialism – and by then he could not care less about these *representatives* of a world of compromise and pretence.

Yet it was this 'lost generation' which fought the invader with its bare hands, with ferocity and a heart torn by overwhelming bitterness. These young men and women threw stones at Soviet tanks for lack of other weapons and set them on fire, while their elders cautioned them not to overdo it, and while some of the military wept on the pavement.

This unexpected outburst of pent-up national and political feeling from Czechoslovak youth has been compared and identified with student and young workers' confrontations in the West. While there may be certain common roots (for

example, contempt for the contentment of the elders), there are some very important differences. One of them is that students' revolts, whether in Warsaw or in Prague, were inspired not by a search for a new order through destruction and anarchy, but quite on the contrary by a desire to establish a meaningful and orderly system of government. In eastern Europe the demand was solely for a system which would ensure and guarantee (constitutionally, by preference) the reign of law, the equality of men before the law, and justice with a healthy dose of common-sense. In the West, the young wanted to destroy notions which to them appeared obsolete and prejudiced; in Prague, they demanded binding rules and regulations to guide the political and social life of the country.

The present generation of Czechs and Slovaks, if one may draw such conclusions, can be counted among the most desperate and disenchanted in present-day Europe. In rebelling, they have little to lose and much to gain. It is a fair guess that we will hear from them again if only because an entire generation cannot live for too long without at least some reasonable hope for the future.

What then remains of the Prague Spring except sweet memories and bitter disappointments? Historically as well as politically, its most significant legacy will probably be the *failure of the experiment*, as it was conceived by its chief protagonists and understood throughout the world by reformist communists, and the non-communist Left. The latter, especially, pinned their often-disappointed hopes on the Prague Spring. They fervently wished to see its full blossoming. Here at last, they thought, a single-party system would change by its own strength and will into a model system, permanently humanized, democratic and socialist, retaining the cherished features of a classless society liberated from the chains of exploitation and the other ugly features of capitalist society. It was in this spirit, too, that the top reformists in Prague visualized their task and their aim. They tried, with enthusiasm and skill, to overhaul a system which was obviously beyond lasting and efficient repair.

The people at large, though sympathetic to the communists' efforts and reforms (but mainly, of course, due to the growing external pressure), desired *structural* changes in the regime. True, due both to history and experience, the majority of Czechs

and Slovaks wanted above all a socialist system, however confused this term had become through being used and misused. Emotionally rather than intellectually, their ideal was a programme of social-democrat character in the West European sense, as practised in some of the Scandinavian countries. In the final analysis, however, this upsurge of political commitment in this memorable spring of 1968 was nothing but the age-old desire for freedom and equality, for social justice and for dignity as men and citizens. With their twenty years' experience of arbitrary rule by a single-party system, the people knew (or at least suspected) that such a system, even if profoundly reformed, could not assure and guarantee, in any permanent fashion, so much as one of these values. Consequently, it had to be dismantled – whether by evolution or revolution.

Faced with, or rather fearing this vicious circle, Dubcek and his friends had only one way left open to them (as had reformist communist leaders in Poland, Hungary and, last but not least, Yugoslavia): to limit the scope and range of their reforms, actual or intended, to shield the privileged positions on which their own power as a governing elite rested. In order to do so at all convincingly, they had to resort to stale ideological theories which were either totally discredited or simply did not make sense. Had they done otherwise, they would have made history as the first communist movement in power to impose certain definite limitations on its own power. These limitations would have gone far beyond the Leninist concept of democratic centralism towards an open, pluralistic society, involving all the risks including that of loss of power. While we may still witness new 'Prague Springs' in other countries, which may take a different course and, hopefully, come to a happier end, it is unlikely that a totalitarian system will ever give up power of its own accord.\*

\*The process of the mellowing or decaying of totalitarian regimes is of a different nature and beyond the scope of our enquiry. So are the peculiarities of 'national communism' as evident in Yugoslavia or Rumania. The failure to reform a communist regime adequately does not exclude a continuous dialogue with the protagonists of change, quite the contrary – provided a spade is called a spade by their non-communist, especially socialist, interlocutors. There has been far too much sentimentality and even reluctance to recognize certain undeniable facts (such as the reactionary features of the Soviet regime) on the part of otherwise highly intelligent and critical Western Left intellectuals.

Herein lies the other lesson of the Czechoslovak events. A remarkable attempt was made to bring about social change within a bureaucratic dictatorship without recourse to violence. The change was to come gradually, through established institutions and organizations, in co-operation with Parliament and the government, whilst checks and balances were to be imposed throughout the sensitive process. This was all to take place within the framework of a dictatorship and under the supervision of its less rigid, younger representatives. Yet very soon in this process, the more farsighted (or truly democratic) among them felt compelled to issue the 'Two Thousand Words' Manifesto to draw attention to an imminent danger: the Spring Prague was declining into a sleepy half-way affair, the top leaders entrenching themselves once again in their power-elite fortress, pulling up the drawbridges and filling the moats with thick ideological mud. The Manifesto called upon the people to exert immediate and constant pressure on the fortress from below, lest their spring dreams should evaporate. The people responded with enthusiastic support, and the reformists in their fortress responded with apprehension and fear. Clearly, even under the bluest of skies, the Prague Spring would have had a rough road ahead of it. Though it was then still possible to debate the pros and cons of a coalition with those people who for a variety of reasons felt compelled to obstruct and perhaps even finally to destroy the reforms, such considerations would be the least immediate if another such chance offered itself.

The inner inconsistencies of the Dubcek era pointed to a failure of the experiment throughout the eight months of its duration, and radicalized the situation, not only in Czechoslovakia. It will prove difficult in the future to mobilize the masses, their strength and their enthusiasm, for socialism with a human face as Dubcek conceived it. If given the opportunity, they will ask *in advance* for assurances and guarantees. Or, rather than negotiate, they may prefer to take by storm an unreliable power elite which, although well meaning, remains entrenched in its fortress.

The Soviet-led invasion, which cut short the Dubcek experiment, radicalized the situation further, and not only in Czechoslovakia. The military intervention – not to mention the arrogant and cynical way in which it was carried out – unmasked (if this

was still necessary) with one dramatic stroke the imperialist, aggressive, reactionary and morally corrupt nature of the neo-Stalinist Soviet regime. It gave the sad but salutary lesson that a communist dictatorship is by its very nature permanent, able to change its costume but never its skin.

In this context, the peaceful, cautious, orderly approach of the Czechs proved unrewarding. As we have seen, Prague avoided taking drastic steps, or rather any steps at all, which might have provoked Moscow or pushed her allies, the Warsaw Pact generals or the COMECON economists, into a tight corner. As a matter of fact, in their dealings with the Soviet super-power, the Czechoslovak Party and government went much further than any self-esteeming, sovereign country would ever dream of going. If anything, they were over-discreet and accommodating. And yet when all these complicated and humiliating efforts proved in vain and the armies of the Five treacherously invaded the country, the Czechoslovak leadership allowed them to march in without a shot being fired, without any organized military defence. The reward for this capitulation (so forcefully defended by the Czech leaders) was more humiliation and more persecution. Finally, the reformists themselves were also caught in the web of cause and effect which inevitably takes murderous forms in a totalitarian system under strain. It is unlikely that the Czechs (and for that matter the Yugoslavs or Rumanians) will ever again make the same mistake by giving up without a struggle.

There seems to be no way out of this vicious circle in that part of the world, the situation seems frozen and hopeless, thus preparing the ground for revolt or an armed clash which will in all probability be both bloody and desperate. Before passing this regrettable verdict, let us review briefly the motives which led the Soviet Union into the Czechoslovak adventure. They might serve as a warning should developments similar to those in Prague arise again, and perhaps also as a guide in interpreting Soviet tactics, intentions and weaknesses.

It appears (unless all the evidence is misleading) that the Soviet Union felt threatened by the possibility that a communist regime in the centre of her European sphere of interest was on the verge of liberalizing itself, and perhaps even disintegrating in its classical, repressive and outdated form. The danger

was all the more acute as it had a momentum of its own : if the Czech communists were allowed to reform and democratize, the East German and Polish Communists would soon attempt the same thing – or be forced to do so by popular pressure. And if Prague succeeded in preserving some vestige of independence, pressure for liberalization in East Berlin and Warsaw would soon become intolerable and would spell the end of the Ulbricht and Gomulka regimes.

Such developments might have serious consequences in the Soviet Union itself, already beset and weakened by a series of ills, ranging from polycentric tendencies in the international communist movement to the ‘desertion’ of the Chinese colossus from the Moscow-led camp, and the slow but visible disintegration of Stalin’s post-war empire in Central and Southern Europe along with the deep underground murmurings of the subjugated nationalities in the vast Soviet country itself, and the dangerously long and vulnerable Chinese frontier. The present Soviet leadership of heavy bureaucrats often resembles a squad of firemen moving from one danger spot to another rather than a political body which plans and forms policies.

As we have seen, there were political and strategic considerations behind the final Soviet decision to strike against Czechoslovakia. All motives were important but they should all be viewed and evaluated as defensive rather than offensive bearing in mind the spectre of the gradual weakening of the Soviets’ western frontier. This frontier had to be secured and held at all costs. Moscow’s main reasons for intervening in the crude manner it finally did, were succinctly summarized by a former Radio Prague correspondent in Moscow who had long had access to leading Soviet officials. After cautioning the Italian comrades not to repeat the mistake of thinking that perhaps the reasons for the invasion had to be found *ad hoc* and not in any careful preparation, the Czechoslovak correspondent drew a picture of a Soviet leadership more scared than is generally suspected by the mounting, if silent or silenced, opposition within the Soviet Union :

The Czechoslovak January (1968), complicated in itself and doubly complicated for Moscow, arose within a context of other awkward questions intimately connected with the current need of the U.S.S.R. to remain the leading power in the socialist camp, the

centre of the international communist movement, the force co-directing politically and militarily the future developments of the present-day divided world, itself endangered by attempts to change the balance of power (competition in the cosmos, the problems of China, Vietnam and Cuba, questions of military development). The Czechoslovak January rendered topical once again Lenin's well-known thesis that the Soviet Union might become a second-rate power ideologically. . . Now, such a position of inferiority would be paradoxical in view of the situation in which the U.S.S.R. finds itself economically and, above all, militarily, as the leading force of the socialist camp. There was a danger that the foundations of a new ideological centre might be laid in Czechoslovakia, an attempt to build socialism with a functioning democracy, which would be attractive primarily to those European socialist countries whose recent history is similar to that of Czechoslovakia.

Why a military intervention? . . . It had one evident advantage : there was no recourse against it, it would be final and uncompromised. Political and/or economic sanctions would have been slow and ineffective. . . In addition, the Five . . . had to count with the possibility that the Czechoslovak political leadership would be forced, as had Yugoslavia, to seek economic help outside the socialist camp. The intervention . . . served to demonstrate, for the present and foreseeable future . . . that the Soviet Union considered the political division of Europe as unchangeable and lasting.

The 21 August 1968, was neither a mistake which could be rectified nor a misunderstanding which could be explained. . . On the contrary, it was a deliberate and well-considered act, as is proved by the still repeated but worn-out thesis about a single model of socialism – and the ridiculous slogan about collective sovereignty. This argument is not only a post-facto justification of 21 August 1968, but, above all, an attempt to prevent future 'Januaries' of whatever provenance.\*

In an attempt to cover up the imperialist nature of the intervention, Moscow drew heavily on its arsenal of shabby propaganda slogans. These ranged from the accusation that Western imperialists, German revanchists and bourgeois social democrats had prepared and directed the Prague Spring, to assorted 'proofs' that a counter-revolution was in the making, the promoters of which were in the pay of Western intelligence services. Since this tight-rope balancing act was a little unconvincing, more

\*Lubos Dobrovsky in *Listy*, No. 7, 20 February 1969.

ideological armour, not so new but still useful, had to be pulled out. Doubters were served a concoction called 'creeping' or 'peaceful' counter-revolution, to be distinguished from an open one. The former, all the more dangerous for its discretion, was said to have taken root in socialist Czechoslovakia. Then came what has become known as the 'Brezhnev doctrine' of limited sovereignty, vehemently contested by Moscow and denounced as a figment of Western imagination. Yet, as early as 3 July 1968, Brezhnev had himself declared: 'We will not, and must not, remain indifferent to the fate of the building of communism in other countries, and to the cause of communism in the world at large.' Prime Minister Kosygin stated (on 19 September 1968), that military intervention in Czechoslovakia 'was inevitable because the security of the Soviet Union was threatened'. And on 12 November in Warsaw Brezhnev declared that when socialism is threatened 'it becomes not only a problem for the people of the country concerned, but a common problem and concern for all the socialist countries.'\*

From all this, one can conclude that the Soviet leadership claims the right and duty to intervene in the internal affairs of any socialist country where, in the judgement of the same leadership, socialism is in danger. This leadership will also ascertain the degree of this threat and decide upon the measures to be taken, military or otherwise. These might also be of a preventive nature. It is evident that a systematic application of the 'limited sovereignty' principle introduces into the international communist movement, and indeed into international relations in general, a new and dangerous element. It is equally clear, however, that the Soviet leadership will apply it in the extreme form of military action only when it can be certain, or almost certain, that it will get away with it.

This brings us to the question of the West's attitude to this kind of international blackmail, likely to reappear in one form or another. Some Western analysts have come to the 'not necessarily depressing' conclusion that the Czechoslovak crisis of 1968 'has been a salutary reminder that *realpolitik*

\*Soviet propagandists such as the ideologist Pospelov maintained that the mere 'ideological neutrality' of a socialist state represented an 'unacceptable danger' for the unity of the communist movement.



remains the dominant factor in European and world politics'.\* This conclusion may perhaps not be depressing but it is certainly shallow, skirting several vast issues. One of them concerns world peace itself. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, as we have seen, was unleashed almost immediately *after* agreement had been reached in Cierna and Bratislava, *after* the climax of tension had passed, and *after* the Prague leadership (and with it most if not all Western governments) had breathed a big sigh of relief. If this pattern of friendly negotiations and firm agreements concluded simply to cover up the preparation of unprovoked military intervention is allowed to continue, then, as some other analysts observed, belief in the predictability and therefore rationality of Soviet conduct is as good as dead.

But there are other compelling reasons besides those of self-defence and self-preservation. It has become fashionable in the West to sneer at moral values in international relations, or at least to stress their helplessness and hopelessness in a world of *realpolitik*. To others, the question smelled of 'bourgeois morals', propagated precisely by those who have committed or condoned the most hideous crimes of repression and aggression. And yet it seems, at least to this writer, that the time has come for Western statesmen (and union leaders and protesters generally) to re-introduce some of these basic values in public life, to cleanse our confused vocabulary and accord clear meaning and pride of place to such notions as freedom, justice, democracy, socialism and international law.

By invading Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union has committed a crime which should be recognized and qualified as such. It has rekindled (for a while, at least) the Cold War, which is not some kind of a myth exploited by Western 'establishments' but the result of the Soviet armed and gendarme-like presence in Central Europe. It has committed aggression for the sole and explicit purpose of destroying a people's search for a freer and better life. The Western powers should take the necessary steps to prevent further encroachments by force on other people's liberty.

They are, alas, most unlikely to do so. One of the lessons the Czechoslovaks have learnt from their most recent tragic history

\*Robert Rhodes James, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

is to rely solely upon themselves. They would be well advised to do so. Czechoslovak Communist Party activists have gone underground. Their chances as well as the risks they run are similar to clandestine movements in any police state.\* However, many of them are experienced in this type of work and they will doubtless draw on the support of comrades both in the other communist countries, Soviet Russia included, and in the rest of the world. At home they can rely on the sympathies of a people united in their opposition to the invader and his henchmen, probably even more than under the Nazi occupation. The danger of weariness (a nation cannot live eternally in a state of siege) is evident. But powerful injections of strength may come, unexpectedly and suddenly, perhaps even from the Soviet Union itself. If this were to be so, events might move fast and dramatically – if only to prove that the ‘paper tiger’ theory was not just another Chinese tale.

\*In March 1971, a group of nineteen young people were sentenced to prison terms up to four years for ‘anti-state activity’. The indictment alleged that the defendants co-operated closely with New Left groups in the West, formed ‘resistance cells’, and distributed ‘tens of thousands’ of anti-regime pamphlets and leaflets.

## Appendix A

### THE MOSCOW PROTOCOL

*Signed by members of the Soviet Communist Party's Politburo  
and by members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party  
Praesidium, on 26 August 1968*

1. During the talks matters were discussed relating to the defence of socialist achievements in the situation which had arisen in Czechoslovakia as well as the primary measures rendered essential by the situation and by the stationing of allied troops in Czechoslovakia. In accordance with the generally recognized norms governing relations between fraternal parties and countries, and in accordance with the principles affirmed in the documents of the Cierna-nad-Tisou and Bratislava conferences, both Parties reaffirmed their loyalty to the agreements between the socialist countries made to support, consolidate and defend socialism and to advance the implacable struggle against counter-revolutionary forces which is an international obligation common to all socialist countries. Both sides likewise affirmed their strong conviction that in the present situation the most important task is to put into practice the principles and obligations flowing from the Bratislava conference and from the agreements made at the negotiations in Cierna nad Tisou.

2. As it was not attended by the members or the secretaries of the Praesidium, nor by the secretaries of the Slovak Communist Party's Central Committee, nor by the majority of representatives from the army and numerous other organizations, the so-called Fourteenth Congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party convened on 22 August last is therefore invalid. On its return to Czechoslovakia the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's Central Committee will take all necessary

measures in relation to this matter. An extraordinary congress will be called when the situation in the Party and the country has been normalized.

3. The Czechoslovak Communist Party delegation announced that a plenary session of the Communist Party's Central Committee would be held in the following six or ten days, with the Party's Control and Auditing Commission attending. This session's aim would be to evaluate the pace of normalization of the country's situation, to take measures likely to improve the work of Party and state bodies, to examine economic questions and the standard of living, to fortify the Party and state apparatus at all levels and to dismiss from office all those whose continuance in their posts would not promote the imperative task of reinforcing the leading role of the working class and of the Communist Party. Furthermore this plenum will apply the resolutions adopted by the January and May 1968 plenums relating to the consolidation of socialism in the country and to the further development of relations between Czechoslovakia and the other countries of the socialist community.

4. The representatives of the Czechoslovak Communist Party agreed that it was necessary to take rapidly a series of measures promoting the strengthening of socialism and of the workers' government, especially to take measures with a view to controlling the information media so that they will serve the cause of socialism fully, and with a view to ending the anti-socialist demonstrations of the radio and television and of certain organizations which had taken openly anti-socialist standpoints. The renewing of activities by the anti-Marxist Social Democrat Party must not be tolerated. Appropriate and effective measures will be taken to achieve these aims fully. The Party and state organs will remedy the situation in the press, the radio and the television, by means of new laws and regulations. Given the present abnormal situation, certain temporary measures will have to be adopted to facilitate the carrying out of these tasks and to enable the government to deal energetically with all anti-socialist activity, both individual and collective. A re-allotment of leading posts in the press, radio and television is inevitable. Here, as at the meeting in Cierna-nad-Tisou, the representatives of the Soviet Communist Party expressed full solidarity with these

measures, which also conform to the basic interests of the socialist community, its security and unity.

5. Both delegations discussed problems connected with the presence of the troops of the five socialist countries and agreed that these troops would not interfere in the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia. As soon as the threat to socialism in Czechoslovakia and to the security of the socialist countries has passed, the allied troops will be withdrawn in stages from Czechoslovak territory. The command of the allied troops and the command of the Czechoslovak Army will immediately begin discussions concerning the removal and change in quarters of military units from cities and villages where the local authorities are able to maintain order. The stationing of troops will be organized in the barracks, exercise grounds and other military areas. The problem of the security of Czechoslovakia's border with the German Federal Republic will be the subject of a special analysis. The number of troops, their organization and redeployment will be determined in co-operation with representatives of the Czechoslovak Army. Material, technical and medical provisions and other problems relating to the troops temporarily stationed in Czechoslovakia will be regulated by special agreements with the Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. An examination of the fundamental issues will be the province of the respective governments. A treaty concerning the stationing and the final withdrawal of the allied troops will be concluded by the Czechoslovak government and the other countries concerned.

6. The Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Party's Central Committee and the government will adopt measures relating to the press, radio and television to exclude the possibility of conflicts between the troops and Czechoslovak citizens.

7. The representatives of the Czechoslovak Communist Party stated that they would not tolerate that Party workers and officials who struggled for the consolidation of socialist positions against anti-socialist forces and for friendly relations with the U.S.S.R. be dismissed from their posts or suffer reprisals.

8. An agreement was reached regarding the opening of negotiations at an early date on a number of economic problems with a view to expanding and intensifying economic, scientific and technical co-operation between the U.S.S.R. and Czecho-

slovakia, especially in relation to the further development of the Czechoslovak economy and to ensure the fulfilling of the economic plan according to the resolution of the Czechoslovak Communist Party Central Committee.

9. Both sides agreed completely that the development of the international situation and the aggressive plots of imperialism directed against peace and the security of nations and against socialism demanded a continual strengthening and increase in efficiency of the Warsaw Pact's defensive system as well of the other organs and forms of co-operation between the socialist countries.

10. The leading representatives of the Soviet and the Czechoslovak Communist Parties resolved to maintain scrupulously the principle of co-ordinated action in international relations, thus fostering the consolidation of unity in the socialist community and of peace and international security. On European matters the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia will continue with the policies they have followed up till now and which conform to the individual and common interests of the socialist countries and are in the interest of European security. They will resolutely oppose militarist, anti-Soviet and neo-national forces whose policies aim at revising the results of the Second World War and the present frontiers in Europe. Both sides expressed their determination to fulfil all obligations stemming from the bilateral and multilateral agreements between the socialist countries. In close co-operation with the other countries of the socialist community they will continue in their struggle against the aggressive plots of imperialism, to support the national liberation movements and work (for a relaxation of international tension).

11. In relation to the discussion of the so-called Czechoslovak affair in the United Nations Security Council, the leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party stated that their country had never asked the Security Council to deal with this matter. The representatives of the Czechoslovak Communist Party also stated that their government had instructed the Czechoslovak delegate in New York to protest against the discussion of the Czechoslovak affair in the Security Council and in any other organs of the United Nations and to insist that this point be withdrawn from the agenda.

12. The Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's Central Committee and the government announced that it would review the activities of those members of the government who were outside the country and made statements in the name of the government of Czechoslovakia concerning internal and foreign policy, especially with regard to the carrying out of the policies of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the government of the Republic. Appropriate measures would then be taken in the light of this analysis. In this connection the representatives of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's Central Committee consider it necessary to carry out further personnel changes in Party and state organs and organizations with a view to ensuring complete consolidation in the Party and the country. All aspects of these questions will be studied when the delegation returns to Czechoslovakia. The activities of the Ministry of the Interior will also be examined fully. Appropriate measures will then be taken to strengthen the direction of this ministry.

13. Both sides agreed to bilateral meetings in the near future, with delegations from both Parties and governments, to examine fully and resolve any problems which might arise in their mutual relations as well as to discuss current international questions.

14. Both delegations agreed that in the interest of the two Parties and of Soviet-Czechoslovak friendship they would consider as strictly confidential all contacts between representatives of the Czechoslovak and Soviet Communist Parties after 20 August 1968. This agreement thus also covers these talks that have just concluded.

15. Both sides pledged in the name of their Parties and governments to promote all efforts of the Soviet Communist Party and the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the governments of their respective countries to intensify both the traditional friendship between the peoples of both countries and their fraternal ties for eternity.

## Appendix B

*Minutes of negotiations between Vasili V. Kuznetsov and the President of the Czechoslovak National Assembly, Josef Smrkovsky, 11 September 1968*

The following took part in this meeting :

Mr V. V. Kuznetsov, representative of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, member of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, member of the Supreme Soviet, First Deputy to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union; S. V. Chervonenko, Soviet Ambassador in Prague; J. A. Cherkassov, First Secretary at the Soviet Embassy in Prague; Josef Smrkovsky, President of the Czechoslovak National Assembly; Vladimir Kaigl, General Secretary of the Czechoslovak National Assembly; Ing. Josef Adamek, President of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the National Assembly.

SMRKOVSKY – In welcoming you I feel sure that these talks will help clarify what is most important to us and also help us feel that our interests are common ones. I should like to know whether you feel that our talks should observe the rules of protocol or whether they should rather be a conversation between communists.

KUZNETSOV – I am not a diplomat. I am in the habit of telling my friends what I really think and I think that by your doing likewise we would understand each other better. I should like to thank you for finding the time to receive me. I have been asked to greet you on behalf of comrades Brezhnev, Kosygin, Podgorny and the other member of the Politburo. The question of the future development of friendly relations between our countries is greatly preoccupying our leaders at this moment. They hold the basic principle that relations between fraternal nations are necessary and they seek to guide these relations in a way profitable to our nations, to socialism and the communist movement and to give support to the anti-imperialist forces. Our friendship rests on solid foundations and there are no forces capable of shaking it.



It is one of long standing and our one aim is to strengthen it further. In the present situation our leaders are trying to neutralize all those forces which seek to divide us, so that we may find a solution to our problems and develop co-operation further. I think that we should be guided primarily by the conclusions drawn by our two parties at the Moscow talks and take them as a point of departure for further undertakings. At present we should above all seek those solutions most likely to aid the building of socialism and to achieve our principal aims. We should proceed in accordance with the agreements reached at Moscow and take the documents adopted at the Moscow conference between the 23 and 26 August 1968 as a basis for action. I should like to stress that in our opinion this is the only possible course. We should see to it that the efforts expended at Moscow were not in vain. Using that as a starting-point we shall have to develop the consolidation of confidence and co-operation on a wider basis.

I shall not conceal from you that our leaders are worried by certain facts and incidents that have come to light since 26 August. I should like to explain to you what comrade Brezhnev and others feel about some of them. After 26 August measures were certainly taken in accordance with the protocol and the communiqué. But these first measures already had aspects which worry us and to which I feel it is necessary to draw your attention.

I have already spoken with comrades Dubcek, Cernik and Svoboda. On returning from Moscow certain members of your delegation appeared before the nation to speak about the negotiations. Some of them made every effort to mobilize the population so that it should accept fully the measures adopted. However the speech made by the President of the National Assembly on his return from Moscow was not faithful to the spirit of the protocol; on the contrary, it lent itself to exploitation by certain forces who sought to worsen the situation.

The plenary session of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's Central Committee co-opted a large number of new members and expanded the Praesidium of the Central Committee. Our leaders were not expecting this and do not conceal their surprise at not being consulted in this matter. They are anxious to know whether this new team in the Central Committee and the Praesidium are capable of mobilizing the Party and the nation in

accordance with the protocol. We are wondering whether some of these comrades only intend to conform to the protocol as a matter of form. A sincere struggle without trickery is needed to make sure that it is honoured. It is the Czechoslovak comrades themselves who stated that it must be the basis for future relations between us. Much has been achieved since August 26 but there are still things which preoccupy us. For instance there is still a certain atmosphere in the press and the radio which make us feel that the Party has not yet been sufficiently mobilized. Things are a bit better in Slovakia, thanks especially to comrade Husak, but even there we are not satisfied with what is being written in the press. It is not yet quite clear that the Central Committee has issued the necessary directives to ensure that all clauses of the protocol are observed. We have the impression that there are attempts to evade the essential questions dealt with in the agreement and that importance is rather being attached to those questions which increase the hostile atmosphere and do not contribute to a settlement.

One could not say that the organs of mass propaganda are yet employing people capable of translating the line of the protocol into practice. Little has been accomplished in that direction and as an example I shall only mention one newsreel which was shown after 26 August [Smrkovsky informs him that it is no longer being shown].

There is a tendency to see the question of the departure of our troops as the main problem. Yet the Czechoslovak comrades stated themselves that the departure of these troops would be the last stage of normalization, and could only occur after normalization had been achieved. That is why our attention should be mainly concentrated on questions relating to normalization.

Equally there is too much stress on material damages, even in the columns of *Rude pravo*, which greatly surprises our leaders. Exaggerated figures are given and rumours are even being spread that the Soviet Union will cut down on deliveries which had already been included in the plan. This is quite contrary to the facts and can only serve to confuse the population. We have already published this fact in *Pravda* and stressed that, on the contrary, we intend to step up certain deliveries, especially petrol, gas and iron ores. These facts should be made known in Czechoslovakia as well. Otherwise one gets the impression

that you are suggesting that the Soviet Union is the cause of all your difficulties.

The report of the meeting of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's Praesidium given in *Rude pravo* last Saturday stresses that the abnormal situation is due to the presence of foreign troops. Such information is contrary to the protocol, it stands the real problem on its head, which naturally does not help.

Hostile reactions to Soviet soldiers still persist, one still finds slogans like: 'Occupiers go home,' and the population refuses to have any contact with them. We do not insist on broad collaboration, we would be content with normal relations. We for our part have given orders that our soldiers must not under any pretext do anything which might heighten tensions, but on your side hostility persists even in sections of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. As soon as the population seems ready to make contact, it comes up against threats and even reprisals. This goes entirely against our agreements.

Your organs of information and mass propaganda stress the principle of unity. This in itself is a good thing; one must however be aware what unity means with whom and with what aim. This principle must not be presented in a non-Marxist spirit for in our opinion this could be exploited by enemies who, in the present situation, might even be joined by criminal elements.

There are still forces which oppose socialism and friendship with us, and preach neutrality. [Srnkovsky pointed out that the National Assembly refuted this demand although the Polish press had reported that it supported demands for neutrality.] We are aware of the demands for neutrality. But at the present time we must fight against imperialism which is trying to exploit them. In the attitudes of the leaders of the United States, Federal Germany and Great Britain there is much evidence that they would like to separate Czechoslovakia from us and that they are working towards this indirectly under the cover of demands for neutrality. The Czechoslovak press does not stress – nor even mention – the necessity of struggling against the imperialist system. On the other hand it denounces the Party's former methods, which could be exploited by anti-socialist elements. The Czechoslovak Party is not calling the nation to vigilance and is acting as though the class struggle did not exist. The simple fact that there is dissatisfaction in the United States and Western

Germany at the failure of plans directed at you should convince you.

Another thing which preoccupies us is your attitude to relations with the Soviet Union. There is little information on this subject and all contacts are frozen. Our leaders are trying to reactivate them on all levels – Party, parliament, society, production and cultural exchanges. We are very surprised that these contacts have not reached the level of arranging twin towns; they should be intensified and give rise to the discussion of problems.

You will certainly recall your talk with comrade Brezhnev when he expressed the hope that a large majority of the National Assembly would not only accede to the Moscow Protocol but would give it their active support. If you do not adopt that course you may run very grave risks. There could be a worsening of the situation which would be of profit to our enemies only. The Soviet comrades know what authority you have and know that your influence would be considerable in seeing that the agreements are kept.

For our part we are determined to do our best as well.

SMRKOVSKY – I am not a diplomat but an official of the workers' movement. I shall not change at my age and I want to remain what I have been all my life. My wishing to stress the fact is significant. I, for my part, have already stated publicly that we are not going to learn to be two-faced now. I shall not name those who are; but to my mind it is not the Soviet comrades. It is not in our character to be two-faced and thus we feel obliged to speak frankly unlike others. That is all I wanted to say by way of introduction.

I do recall my talks with comrades Brezhnev, Kosygin and Podgorny when we met in Moscow, in the building of the Central Committee to which I had been brought. Comrade Brezhnev said at the time that it was not the moment to examine who was personally responsible for the situation we were in and that one might discuss it for ever. I am personally of the same opinion. We have not the time now to find out whether everything that happened was inevitable; that is why I shall not speak of it. However it would not be honest if I did not tell you my own personal opinion. I am convinced that nothing was inevitable for we had not by any means exhausted the possibilities of allaying your fears. Even now certain newspapers in the friendly socialist

countries continue to publish accusations of counter-revolution and the like. We have 80,000 armed communist workers – the Workers' Militia – they alone could have crushed all attempts at counter-revolution. In addition we have a regular army and other armed units. That is all I shall say on the question and I believe that it would be better to assess these matters in the future, in a calmer atmosphere.

I would ask you not to bring up the subject again. [Kuznetsov gives his agreement.] We realize that it is impossible to resolve our differences by force or to settle our conflicting views on who is right and who wrong by that means. It would be a catastrophe since you number 230 million while we are only 14 million. Such a solution is both technically and rationally out of the question; the only possibility remaining is to agree and try to find a common language. Our constitutional organs – the National Assembly, the government and especially the Party – are firmly decided to keep to the Moscow Protocol, but everything cannot be achieved overnight. I trust you will understand that. You think that everything should move faster; we believe that in the end everything will go fast enough, but that a certain amount of time is needed. One cannot change the psychology of a nation overnight. I repeat that we will keep to the Moscow Protocol; I myself shall do so.

I am aware that comrade Brezhnev and the Politburo were dissatisfied with my speech. I believe that in order to continue my work as an official of the workers' movement and spokesman for the people, it was my duty to let them know my thoughts. I neither wished nor was able to use the language of diplomats, whereas the President of the Republic, the First Secretary and the Prime Minister did so fittingly. For my part I had to express my feelings so the people might know I shared their troubles. The people trust us. This is a reality at the moment. Later, our personal authority will be exercised through the organs that we represent; but for the time being the people want to know our personal views which they consider decisive; they have their reasons for thinking so. Even in the future the question of authority will play a part – but that is a problem of secondary importance in the present context. I wanted to mention my speech to the nation to you, and should there be an opportunity I should like to speak about it with the other Soviet leaders too.

When I was taken to Moscow I said to comrade Kosygin that I was ready to carry out policies based on the principles of socialism which had the support of public opinion. Should we not find public support and should our intentions not be understood, I would definitely resign. At the moment the people and I understand each other and I am determined to carry out with the people all agreements that we have signed. I have devoted my whole life to our Communist Party, of which I have been a member for thirty-six years. The Soviet Union has been my second homeland. I should like to continue along the same road all my life. It is possible that we have different opinions on certain questions, particularly in respect of tactics – but that should not prevent us from respecting each other.

The Central Committee of our Communist Party has co-opted 80 new members and has enlarged its Praesidium. The former Central Committee was to a large extent responsible for what has happened as many of its members had lost the people's trust. That was the cause of popular mistrust and the attacks in the information media. The people I refer to were known as 'comrade Novotny's set'. Nobody wants to hear of them again and thus it is quite impossible that they should be able to put the Party's point of view across at meetings. As an example, I shall refer only to J. Nemeč, secretary of the regional federation of the Party for central Bohemia, who was literally imposed as representative by comrade Novotny at the last elections. There are dozens of similar cases. We had to co-opt new members to enable the Central Committee to regain authority and implement the Party's policies in a responsible manner. All of them were elected in the usual way at departmental and regional Party conferences. They are communists who will respect our agreements: I can vouch for them all personally. The same goes for our Party's Praesidium. You say that you worried about certain former members leaving, for example comrade Indra. But in that connection we have 84,000 signatures from the electoral district of Gottwaldov where comrade Indra was a candidate. The cases of comrade Kolder and others are similar: we received 45,000 resolutions, some of them bearing 80,000 signatures. I shall place these resolutions at your disposal so you may study them with your interpreter. In this respect you will understand how difficult our position is. (The President of the Assembly

shows him files of resolutions.) We know that no one would come to any meetings where these comrades might appear and therefore it is quite clear that we cannot expect them to be successful in putting our policies across.

I consider that you should be better informed than you are at present. For our part, we have put everything at your disposal. This does not prevent the press of the socialist countries from claiming, as they have been doing for two weeks, that there are 40,000 counter-revolutionaries here. This rumour originated in Vienna and the press reprints it without having checked it. For this reason some 16,000 to 20,000 of our citizens have left Czechoslovakia or have not yet returned home from abroad for fear of reprisals. We hope that your press will refute these statements so that these citizens will come home, except for perhaps a few of them.

I should like to raise a question which comrade Kuznetsov has not referred to. On 28 October we shall celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of our Republic. On that day the National Assembly will adopt new constitutional provisions concerning the relations between the Czechs and the Slovaks. The Slovak Party Congress had already dealt with this matter; it is essential to call together the representatives of the Czech half of the Party in order to issue a formal proclamation. Thus it is necessary to call a congress of the Czech Communist Party. The signatories of the Moscow Protocol and especially comrades Svoboda, Dubcek, Cernik and myself, as well as Spacek and the other members of the Praesidium present, can vouch that the Czech Party Congress will not diverge from the political line laid down by the Czechoslovak Party Central Committee. We can guarantee you that. The matter is a serious one and it is our duty as comrades to speak of it openly. Personally, I shall never abandon this principle for I have a moral, constitutional and Party obligation towards the Czech nation in this respect. In spite of attempts to postpone the Slovak Party Congress, it clearly managed to accomplish everything expected of it; even the Soviet comrades agree that this is so. There is therefore no reason to suppose that it will be otherwise with the Czech Party Congress.

Your criticisms of the mass media are known to us. Next Friday a law will be adopted in this connection. I have personally undertaken to see that the first government draft of this law is

amended. We shall introduce preliminary censorship; I have already discussed the matter with the legal commission and I shall also meet the journalists' representatives, although the matter is really one for the government and does not really concern me. The appearance of certain articles which are contrary to the spirit of the Moscow Protocol must be regarded as a temporary phenomenon which will disappear in a few days. Our position is not easy, for our journalists show us what is being written in other countries: such untruths can only hurt our feelings. If we are to make efforts with our press, we consider it only just to demand that others should do so too. For instance why does *Trybuna Ludu* publish untruths about our National Assembly? Next Friday we intend to send a message to the Polish parliament via diplomatic channels to establish the truth of the matter. I believe that the members of the Assembly should not be silent when things which are untrue are published about them.

With regard to the stationing of troops on our territory, I did not understand the Moscow Protocol to mean that half a million soldiers would be kept there until normalization was completely achieved. This question is a matter for the government. I think it will be difficult to justify to the nation the presence of 500,000 soldiers of the five Warsaw Pact armies in our little country, when our own army has 240,000 men of its own. It seems completely contrary to military logic. We cannot solve the problem of winter quarters for all these troops. I repeat that this is a matter for the government, but it will have to acquaint the National Assembly with its position on the matter. I hope that our government together with the five allies will find a satisfactory solution to all these problems. If the troops are here for other reasons of which I am not aware, I cannot give you my opinion. On the subject of the Dresden conference I should like to point out that I was at the time not yet a member of the Praesidium of our Party's Central Committee. I understood the Moscow Protocol to mean that the troops would not stay here for long but would be withdrawn in stages.

Our government is considering the problem of the damages we have sustained and they will draft a text on the matter to be submitted to the National Assembly next Friday. At this session the results of the latest Moscow talks – which were positive



according to our information – will be dealt with. The rumours about delays in Soviet deliveries are negligible.

There still remains however a serious problem: bad relations with your soldiers. Our friendly relations with Russia have been growing over more than a hundred years and with the Soviet Union for fifty years. It would be dishonest not to mention the present deterioration in these relations: I spoke of this in Moscow in circumstances far less favourable than attend our present discussion. We shall have to make great efforts on both sides if there is to be an improvement. Our young generation has had experience neither of capitalism nor of the Nazi occupation, then they suddenly experienced what has just happened. We shall therefore need a lot of tact and patience on both sides. Two days after my return from Moscow I told General Ogartsev that it would be desirable to let two or three months pass before opening up friendly and cultural relations, for at present they would only wound our people's feelings in such a way that any attempt to achieve something in this sphere immediately might easily result in the opposite of that intended.

We have never questioned the ties by which destiny joined us to you and we shall try to develop them. However, knowing our people's psychology much better than you, we would wish to postpone intensifying our relations with you until later, when the people's present state of mind has changed. We intend to take positive measures to create the conditions for normalization and the nation will be informed of their nature next Friday. Although we have decided to paralyse all negative phenomena, we still need a certain amount of time for nothing would be achieved by force.

As far as the demand for unity is concerned we are aware that it could be used to rally hostile elements. You seem however to over-estimate their influence and their importance and yet I can assure you that we do not under-estimate them. We shall get the better of them; if we had wanted to use police methods we would have liquidated them in one go – but we prefer to do so without having recourse to the police. We know that a split will appear and that the rightist elements will keep away. But the group of old dogmatic sectarians that remains is also dangerous. To our mind these dogmatic leftists who are former Novotny supporters are equally dangerous and present a threat to our

Party's policies. We shall watch both of these two extremes for we know how dangerous they can be for the Party policies we are trying to put into practice. I suggest that you visit any industrial plant to get an understanding of what unity means. The workers, the peasants and the intellectuals support the Party's policies and want unity with the socialist countries despite all that has happened. It is not a unity forged by nationalism and it would be wrong to consider it as such. The Czechoslovak Communist Party has never before enjoyed so much authority and power as now. Isolated tendencies towards nationalism, provoked by what has happened, are not a major problem. I am sure that if you stayed with us longer you would realize this yourself.

The demand for neutrality was categorically refuted by the National Assembly.

We should like to develop contacts on all levels. The National Assembly has 298 representatives and I can vouch for 200 of them. This is quite sufficient to guarantee that the Assembly will pursue a policy conforming to the interests of the country, of relations with the Soviet Union and the Moscow Protocol. The Assembly will play the part demanded of it by the Party.

In all questions relating to appointments we shall not allow any persecution of those who persecuted us in the fifties. Only we are of the opinion that they should quit the political scene for other activities: they will have their opportunities in international organizations and in the diplomatic service. They are 'dead souls' as far as the Party is concerned.

Comrade Chervonenko is well aware of the fact that comrade Indra was chosen to head a revolutionary committee which was to have judged us on 21 August. This has been reported to us. We do not wish to have our revenge but the people would not understand if we did not take our leave of him. They would say it was at Moscow's express request.

Until a short time ago massive arrests were feared in Czechoslovakia because of the presence of the N.K.V.D. (K.G.B., Soviet Secret Police) here. This fact was spoken of in Moscow. I should like to believe that these fears will be dissipated and that there will be a normalization in that sphere too.

I presume you are aware that a whole mass of prejudices, problems and discontent to which no solutions were found,

had accumulated in our country since the fifties. This led to an explosion last January and for weeks the Party leadership was so overwhelmed by it that they were not able to pacify everyone at once. The cause of certain events can be found in this fact. We realized that last January was the 23rd hour. At Cierna we were still convinced that we could cope with all these problems. To understand our position you must remember what the situation was like here before January.

Our prisons held more than 30,000 innocent victims and other innocent people had been executed. You took certain measures in 1956 and other countries followed your example. But in our country the people were still being deceived and attempts were made to have them believe that everything had been settled.

To conclude I shall tell you again that I do not intend to share your opinions on everything. I say this honestly. I do not wish to be two-faced but I shall honour my signature in harmony with public opinion.

KUZNETSOV – I am very grateful to you for your frank explanations of how you view the questions confronting us. I should like to have the opportunity of listening to you at length to understand better what is happening in your country. Your explanation helps me to grasp these matters. Nevertheless I should like to make a few remarks about some of the points you have raised. I agree with you that this is not the time and that it is not in our interest to analyse the past. We must take the protocol as it is and find the best way of putting it into practice. That is the attitude of our Politburo towards the matter. We have our own opinion as to the causes which led to our action of the 20 August in aid of the Czechoslovak nation. A discussion on this would not necessarily end in our agreeing. You ask us to take account of your local problems in achieving normalization rapidly. We are aware of the complexity of the situation and the different factors which may influence it and we understand your difficulties. Our one concern is to avoid the possibility of this process being diverted in a different direction. We have the impression that the train of events could go a quite different way.

SMRKOVSKY – On our behalf I have to say 'Niet'.

KUZNETSOV – I can appreciate that declaration. However I believe that in political life it is not always intentions that count

but more often the objective direction that activity takes. Our fears are inspired by facts and they seem well founded to us. It is important to take steps to see that the protocol is put into practice; I say this to draw your attention to this point again. With regard to the information media, your press is fostering hostile feelings towards the Soviet soldiers. People working on the radio and television who led a campaign of anti-Soviet and anti-socialist propoganda have kept their jobs. Our leaders are sure that from the 20 and 21 August secret transmitters went into action, which in our eyes constitutes anti-socialist activity. We see no sign of any measures taken against these people who, as I said, are still in their jobs. There is great negligence with regard to the employees of the radio and television.

CHERVONENKO – Why did your press not publish the letter by the founding members of the Party?

SMRKOVSky – We knew nothing about it. We will gladly publish it all in *Rude pravo*.

KUZNETSOV – We do not agree with your attitude towards those who supported us. We have noticed the pressures which are being exerted at the moment on those in the Party Secretariat who did not leave the building of the Central Committee on 21 August. These people should be congratulated and yet there is a rumour that they will be dismissed.

As far as the signatures are concerned, I know about that from my own experience. . . I know that in our country too, at difficult moments, there has been discontent among the workers and strikes were even organized. But the reason for this lies in a weakening of Party work. We ask ourselves who is organizing these signature campaigns? I do not know comrade Indra but one must ask oneself whether it is not in someone's interest to undermine his authority. Comrade Chervonenko knows both Indra and Kolder. As for comrade Bilak, everyone knows he was an active supporter of the post-January policies and that he opposed A. Novotny as did Indra.

On the subject of our troops here, I must remind you, in order to avoid all misunderstandings, that our Politburo is observing the protocol itself concerning the stages of their withdrawal. That of course depends on the process of normalization.

As for contacts with our country, we are also of the opinion

they should be broadened. But in your country there seems to be a desire to impose the idea that the Soviet Union wants a return to the era of Novotny.

SMRKOVSKY – None of us think that; I make that point in all of my speeches.

KUZNETSOV – I am glad that you have assured me that at least 200 representatives of the National Assembly consider the protocol the basis for solving all problems. However I wish that all 298 of them thought so.

SMRKOVSKY – I on the other hand would not wish it, for it would not be plausible. To my mind 250 count for more than 298.

I believe you somewhat raised your voice when speaking of the transmitters. I should like to explain to you that we already have more than 2,000 transmitters at the disposal of our official organization 'Svasarm' [pre-military instruction, trans. note] and the People's Militia. Thus they are not secret transmitters. The People's Militia form part of our country's armed forces. No one has yet found any secret transmitters in our country; I do not know if you have any further information on this subject.

Let us come back to the question of cadres. I would only like to add that I personally, as President of the National Assembly and member of the Central Committee Praesidium, only heard of the entry of your troops when it had already happened, whereas Kolder, Indra and Jakes had been informed of the fact the night before. We have proof of this and we would like an explanation. With regard to Kolder: it is known, especially in the Ostrava district, that he is an inveterate alcoholic whom it is difficult to accept as an honest man. I know that a man of his moral complexion could not hold a leading post in the Czechoslovak Communist Party. But he could be useful in some other post where it would not be so embarrassing.

In conclusion, I should like to say again that it would not be loyal to assert that our opinions are the same on all matters. But after all that is not essential. I hope that this talk will not be the last and that a longer stay in Czechoslovakia will permit you to understand the real situation.

KUZNETSOV – I too would wish the same. Nevertheless I should like to express my astonishment at the fact that your security forces did not get instructions on the 20 August to take charge

of the transmitters.

SMRKOVSKY – On that night the leading representatives of our country ceased to govern.

KUZNETSOV – But they are governing again now.

SMRKOVSKY – But we are hardly on our feet yet; I ask you to have a little understanding, we cannot do everything at once.

KUZNETSOV – To conclude, I should like to assure you that our Politburo is ready to help you and that we wish to show understanding of your situation.



ALEXANDER DUBCEK